



Funded by
UK Government



**Business
For Good**
West Yorkshire

Business for Good, West Yorkshire Growth & Resilience Programme Evaluation and Learning Summary

Produced by Nifty Sustainability CIC for Business for Good West Yorkshire

March 2025



CO-OPERATIVES UK



Supported by

**West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority**

**Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire**

This project is funded by the UK Government through the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) and managed by Third Sector Leaders Kirklees CIO, charity no: 1162592

Driving success: a partnership approach to Growth & Resilience programme design and delivery.

Part of the Business for Good West Yorkshire ([BfGWY](#)) programme, funded by the UK Government through [the UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) and led by TSL Kirklees, the Growth and Resilience support programme was co-designed and delivered by Co-operatives UK and the School for Social Entrepreneurs.

As the voice of the UK's co-operative movement, [Co-operatives UK \(CUK\)](#) empowers and supports co-operative enterprises with specialised knowledge and expertise, to grow the co-operative economy and create a fairer society.

The [School for Social Entrepreneurs \(SSE\)](#) works with around 1,000 social enterprises a year, helping leaders to start, scale and strengthen organisations that make a positive difference. Learning with SSE is inspiring, action-based and accessible.

[Third Sector Leaders Kirklees](#) is the lead organisation for the wider BfGWY programme, as such the BfGWY Programme Manager played a key role in supporting the G&R programme design, monitoring, co-ordinating and reporting outputs, as well as connecting the G&R programme to wider activities.

Addressing inequalities across West Yorkshire

Meet the inspiring alternative businesses supported on the Growth & Resilience programme





The innovative Growth & Resilience Programme - a cornerstone of Business for Good West Yorkshire – has supported people from different types of alternative businesses to build confidence, become more resilient, and connect with others. Here we discuss how, and why it matters to the way we support alternative businesses in the future.

This evaluation and learning summary highlights key findings from an independent review of the Growth and Resilience (G&R) learning programme, delivered as part of the Business for Good, West Yorkshire programme.

Running from May to October 2024, the 6-month programme was developed and delivered in partnership by Co-operatives UK ([CUK](#)) and the School for Social Entrepreneurs ([SSE](#)) as a key part of the wider Business for Good West Yorkshire ([BfGWY](#)) programme led by TSL Kirklees.

The Growth & Resilience learning programme aims

The G&R programme was designed to support people from different types of existing alternative businesses to grow their impact and build resilience in ways that lead to positive outcomes for participants, their organisations and wider communities.

The specific aims of the Growth & Resilience programme were to:

- Prioritise, encourage, support and promote alternative businesses in marginalised and disadvantaged communities through local VCSE networks and community knowledge.
- Support existing alternative businesses to develop new services or markets, bolstering economic resilience and sustainability.

- Promote and support entrepreneurship focused on creating better quality jobs.
- Provide specialist support that understands and addresses alternative businesses' needs including business strategy, organisational development, raising capital, managing working capital needs, and cashflow.

The headline is that the innovative Growth & Resilience learning programme clearly delivered on these aims.

We know this because (see Figure 1):

- 19 alternative businesses completed the programme
- ~2 new FTE jobs were created and 6 were safeguarded
- 11 alternative businesses reported engaging in new markets
- 6 already adopted new technologies or processes
- 100% of G&R programme participants reported being satisfied with the support they were offered
- 100% of G&R programme participants increased their skills
- The G&R programme reached marginalised and disadvantaged communities: 59% of alternative businesses were based in 30% most deprived areas (IMD)
- 88% of participants have lived experience of the issues their alternative businesses are seeking to address

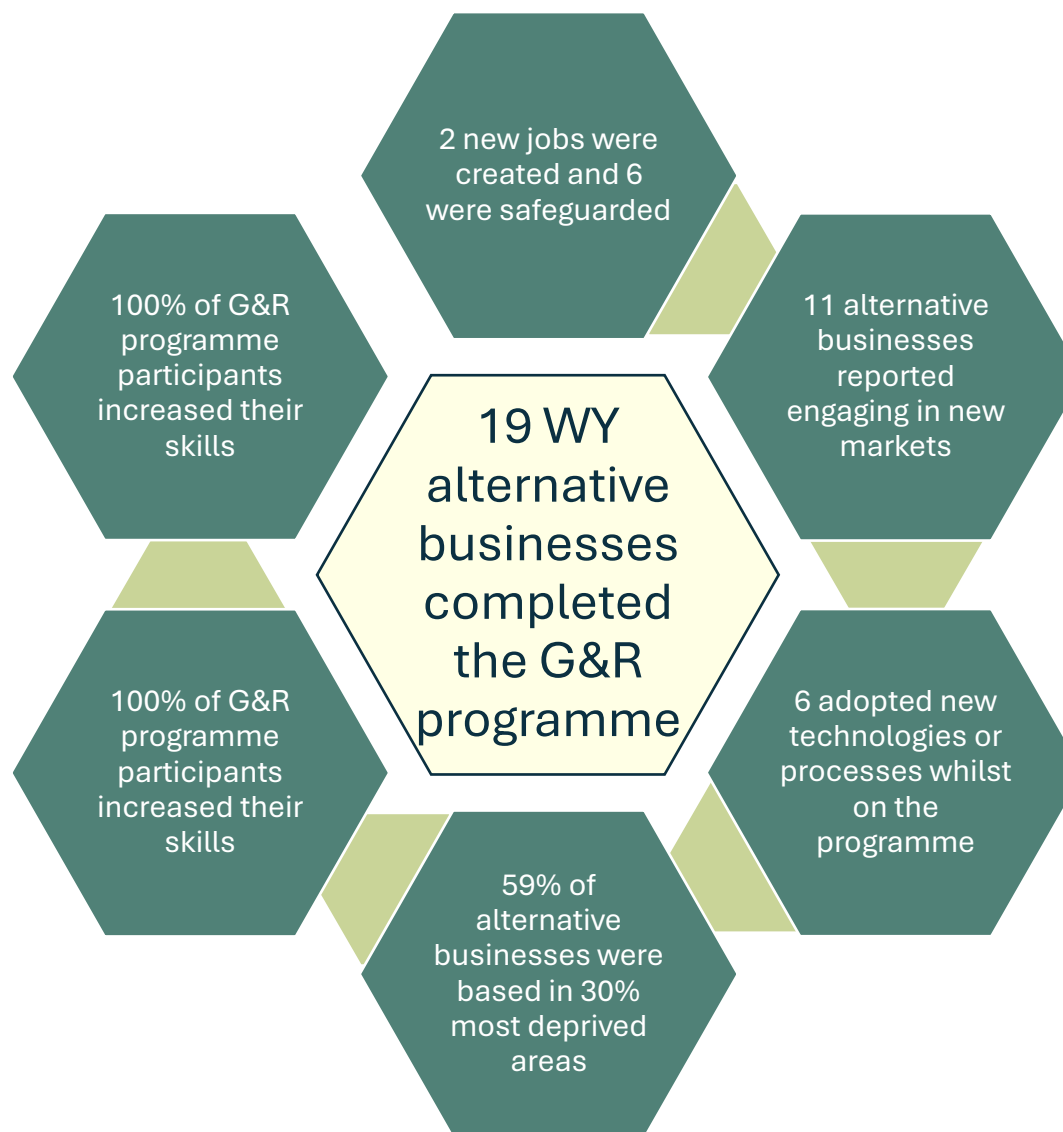


Figure 1: The Growth & Resilience learning programme in numbers. Summary of outputs and outcomes.

Growth & Resilience learning programme delivery

The G&R programme was delivered via a [range of activities](#) designed to build on the different experience and expertise of the delivery partners in ways that support diverse alternative businesses and, ultimately, achieve programme outputs and outcomes. The main activities were:

- Five half day learning sessions each facilitated by SSE with presentations, workshops and support activities in each session led by experts across a range of topics. These included: business development, measuring social impact, financial planning, marketing, branding, and leadership resilience.
- Three Action Learning Sets (ALS) with a trained facilitator supporting participants in smaller groups to identify and overcome stumbling blocks and dilemmas they faced.
- An optional site visit for G&R participants organised by CUK, SSE, TSL Kirklees and [Stir to Action](#) featuring a tour of an established alternative business to create peer networking opportunities.
- Access to wider networks of support including specialist enterprise coaching and capacity building grants through the Business for Good West Yorkshire programme.
- A G&R learning programme celebration event and graduation ceremony for participants, delivery partners and wider stakeholders.

An innovative feature of the G&R programme design was that whilst individual elements of content and delivery approach had been tried and tested by delivery partners in different contexts, G&R participants themselves were able to influence specific programme content in ways that supported their own development and contexts. For example, topics

covered in the five learning sessions were voted for by participants ahead of each session and prioritised in terms of their relevance for different types of alternative businesses.

In this evaluation (see Appendix 1 for list of evaluation activities), we discovered that as an approach, this clearly supported delivery of the G&R learning programme aims by providing specialist relational support that understands and addresses alternative businesses' needs. Five key learning points are:

Five interesting things we've learned about the G&R programme success are:

1. **The unique partnership approach works and adds value in the context of alternative business.**
2. **Short timescales and limits to resources were challenging.**
3. **Different types of alternative businesses, across a range of sectors have been involved and their diverse support needs are being met.**
4. **In person events helped establish and nurture relationships.**
5. **The experience for participants has been positive with some important, sometimes transformational outcomes for individuals involved.**

It's clear that the G&R learning programme has supported participants from different types of alternative businesses to build confidence, connect with other alternative businesses and, importantly, become more resilient. Figure 2 below illustrates the overarching learning that the unique partnership for West Yorkshire has led to the design and delivery of a programme that not only achieves anticipated outputs but also adds value in the context of alternative business.

It shows that the programme builds on different expertise and create links across organisations in ways that amplified and strengthened positive impacts for alternative businesses in the region. Partners were able to use their distinct areas of expertise to design a programme suited to alternative businesses – one which is flexible in its support offering, includes different elements and topics suited to alternative businesses, and clearly focused on outcomes for participants. This in turn leads to wider positive outcomes for participants, delivery partners and wider West Yorkshire business support system.

These key learning points and the connection between them are explored in depth in this report to illustrate that it's the G&R learning programme's unique approach to design and delivery that is driving success.

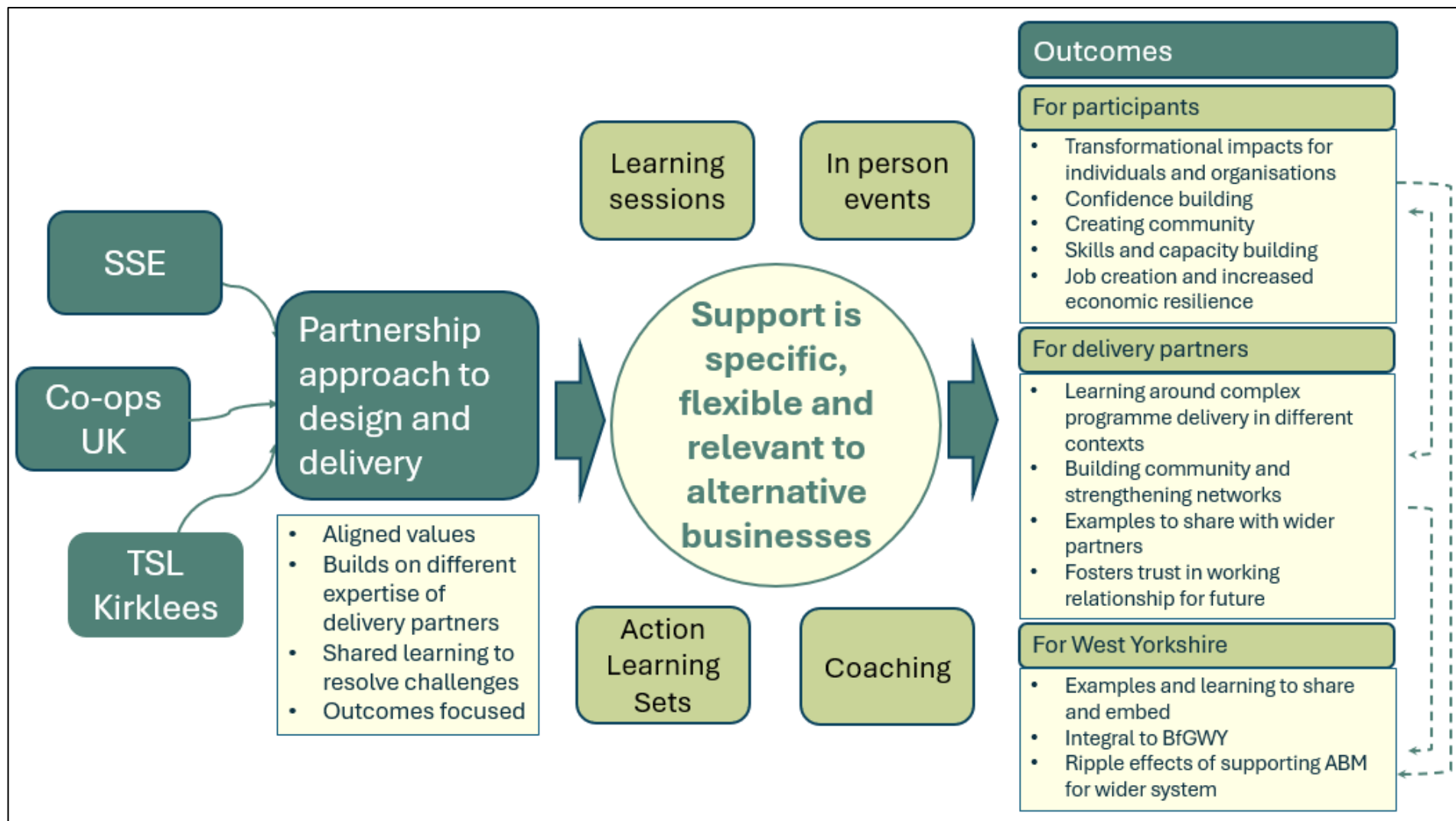


Figure 2: Partnerships approach to design and delivery is leading to positive outcomes for participants, delivery partners and West Yorkshire.

Exploring the key learning

It's clear that core features of the Growth & Resilience approach to supporting alternative businesses – the partnership approach, creating a space to support different types of alternative businesses together, offering flexible support relevant to participants' needs - amplify positive outcomes for participants and lead to important learning for delivery partners which underpin wider outcomes for the whole Business for Good West Yorkshire programme.

Here we explore the five key learning points above in more detail and shine a light on why this innovative programme is having positive impacts for people involved.

ONE: The partnership approach works and adds value in the context of alternative business.

As an important cornerstone of the G&R learning programme, the partnership approach between CUK, SSE and TSL Kirklees has been instrumental in delivering the programme aims. We saw the benefits of this approach at every stage in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the programme as well as in the outcomes for participants.

The benefits and added value arising from the partnership approach relate to two interconnected points: trust and aligned values between partners, and innovation to maximise resource use.

Throughout this evaluation, we witnessed a strong working relationship between the partners which was founded on shared organisational and individual values. This trusting foundation allowed the partners to combine their strengths, leverage different areas of expertise to design, deliver, and monitor the G&R learning programme effectively. This synergy also enabled partners to define clear roles and responsibilities, fostering

collaboration without duplication and creating opportunities for innovation and shared learning, thereby maximising resource use.

One example of this relates to establishing systems and processes for the G&R programme delivery. Partners all brought significant experience from delivery of similar or related programmes and had experience of or had established systems and processes around monitoring and reporting in place. This meant that only minor adjustments were needed to make them suitable for the G&R programme. In this sense the partnership approach led to genuine efficiency gains.

The combination of these factors i.e. the trust that was built and the efficient use of resources, also meant partners had the confidence and capacity to try innovations in alternative business support, which in turn led to new learning and new approaches being developed. The Spotlight on the Partnership (Box 1) below illustrates these points in practice.

Over and above efficiency gains which enabled delivery of contractual obligations and outputs, the experiences and outcomes for individual participants mattered deeply to delivery partners: the experiences and outcomes of individual participants. The individualised support, relational approach and genuine care for the wellbeing of participants, combined with delivery partners' deep understanding of the context has had a positive effect on outcomes.

The impact of this was reflected in participant feedback including in the focus group. Participants reported feeling listened to and having reduced feelings of isolation. They said that in part this was because of the knowledge and experience of delivery partners and facilitators being relevant to the context of alternative business.

Box 1: Spotlight on the unique G&R partnership – expertise, trust and collaboration has driven success

CO-OPERATIVES UK

 school for
social
entrepreneurs

 **tsl**
KIRKLEES
THIRD
SECTOR
LEADERS

In the early stages of programme design, the intention had been for delivery partners to deliver specialist programmes separately to different types of alternative businesses. However, in delivery partner meetings, it became clear that this would lead to duplication of effort and miss potential opportunities for participants across different types of alternative businesses to connect with each other. SSE and CUK decided to combine resources and knowledge to bring together co-operatives and social enterprises into a single Growth & Resilience programme.

Combining SSE's experience in delivering Start Up, Trade Up and Scale Up programmes, and CUK's, experience in delivering national support programme such as co-op start-up and accelerator programmes like UnFound, delivered clear benefits both in terms of building a relationship between the partners, and in terms of maximising resource use. This meant that delivery partners were not starting from scratch and so were able to face the challenge of tight timescales. Delivery partners reflected that:

'Partner organisations have distinct roles and significant expertise – we link up from start to finish'

'[Our] ability to use systems and processes already established but still easy to tweak for BfGWY, worked'

'[It was] great to build on [partners'] expertise of delivering similar programmes... not having to start from scratch'

The partners' clearly defined roles and responsibilities meant there was little to no overlap in resource use. It would have been difficult to deliver this complex, innovative support programme without this shared workload. In regular meetings, delivery partners were able to explore different areas of expertise and experience around key stages of the G&R learning programme including programme design, delivery and monitoring. This allowed partners to take sensible 'short cuts' and find system and process solutions that were in line with their shared organisational values, for example, around considering the wellbeing of participants in requests for data for programme monitoring or evaluation.

Ultimately, this successful partnership generated positive impacts for participants (see Box 2) and important learning for the wider VCSE infrastructure and support organisations. By being flexible and adapting programme design and delivery partners were able to meet needs of different alternative businesses which undoubtedly contributed to positive feedback from participants. Underpinning the smart ways of working, the supportive atmosphere and generous working practices meant that partners were able to confidently test ideas and share learning, and, importantly, feel supported in their roles whilst delivering this pilot programme.

'[This is a] fantastic partnership, working across all elements of the wider offer – the G&R programme is working well and supporting each other's work'

TWO: Timescales for design, delivery and monitoring of outputs, and resourcing were challenging for delivery partners with potential impacts for participants.

There were challenges around tight timescales for programme delivery alongside limits to resources available to the programme. In reflections with delivery partners these had impacts in three main areas – recruitment of participants, capacity of coaches, and delivery of content in the learning sessions:

- **Recruitment.** Delivery partners reported having limited time in the early stages of the programme for outreach and recruitment that may have had impacts on ability to connect with marginalised groups. Whilst diverse communities were reached through programme recruitment (see Figure 3 below), limits to resources, time available and differences in the existing networks across the five local authorities meant that reaching marginalised communities was challenging.
- **Capacity of coaches.** All participants were matched with BfGWY Enterprise coaches; however, coaches were working up to and over full capacity in terms of hours of work and the number of participants they could support each week. Together with limits to some participants' capacity to engage with coaching within the programme timescales, this led to some participants starting coaching later than others and others not connecting at all.
- **Duration, frequency and content of learning programme.** Some of the content had to be pared down as compared with the standard SSE learning programme, and some topics which would normally be covered in a whole day were condensed into shorter half day

sessions with additional supporting materials shared afterwards. Whilst this streamlining was managed well and gave participants an opportunity to think about topics they wanted to cover (via a voting system), there was a degree of overwhelm and limits to how much time participants had to digest one topic and reflect on their learning before moving on.

This is reflected in feedback from participants asked what they would change about the programme:

'Last longer! It would be great to have a 12 month follow up and see where we all are.'

An important feature of this learning is that despite these challenges around timescales and resourcing, as above, the partnership approach, and individualised, flexible support meant that aims and outputs were achieved – this reflects the success of the programme. However, there were implications for outcomes achieved in the timescales with the resources available as these reflections from delivery partners below illustrate.

'There was limited budget at the beginning to do the comms and recruitment to reach out, this is not just this G&R part but the whole programme'

'For CUK timescales for recruitment was a particular challenge and some frustration internally that unable to recruit more co-ops'

'Length of programme [was challenging], 6 months is very short... for delivery and having to show outcomes so quickly'

This challenge also applied to the whole [BfGWY programme](#), however, as reported by delivery partners, consideration of more realistic timelines and resource allocation in future programmes may further amplify,

enhance and embed outcomes, for example, in allowing time for more focussed recruitment of participants from marginalised backgrounds.

THREE: Different types of alternative businesses, across different sectors have been involved and supported

An important aspiration of the G&R learning programme is that people from different types of alternative businesses and those from across West Yorkshire were able to participate and benefit equally from participation. Despite recognised challenges around limits to time and resources available for recruitment of participants, it's clear that this has happened. Furthermore, people with different roles (e.g. founders, new in post chief execs, managers and senior leaders, project leads) and in different sectors (see Figure 4 below), benefitted from the experience of working with others and were able to draw out learning in different ways appropriate to their own contexts, sectors and types of organisations.

From observation and discussion with participants and delivery partners, this was in part due to the thoughtful, flexible, and supportive way the programme was designed and delivered with individual support for participants. For example, as illustrated in the quotes from participants below, there was recognition that some topics in the learning programme would be of greater interest to different groups, however, within each session, and across the whole learning sessions, the knowledge and expertise of facilitators and hosts helped participants see how the learning might apply in their own contexts.

'I think this is a much needed programme for small organisations. All participants involved understood the struggles we face and deal with, such as the lack of staff, CEO's doing all roles as no funds to pay for finance, HR, Admin, Marketing.'

Participant feedback.

'Not everything [was] immediately relevant to everyone, but there have been additional resources available so people can follow up when it becomes relevant.'

Participant feedback in focus group

'Bringing social enterprises and co-ops together in one learning programme has worked well'

'[It's] so interesting that the programme is landing and working for SE's and co-ops. It works and is also good for the organisations'

Delivery partner reflections

Co-ordinating the programme across different types of alternative businesses working in different sectors with different community purposes in this way, has amplified learning and been useful for participants and delivery partners alike. Hearing from others encouraged and enabled participants to 'learn out loud' and share their own experiences. This provided a unique opportunity to learn about the strengths, capacities and challenges faced by different types of alternative businesses in practice, which has in turn enabled participants' own self-reflection about their own contexts.

'I've really enjoyed hearing about the experiences of other types of organisations. It's helped me think about why being a co-op works for us and what we can learn from other people about what works for them for example looking at different income sources.'

Participant feedback in focus group

One specific example of this, is the success of the Action Learning Sets whereby participants worked together to delve into challenges and stumbling blocks.

‘The action learning sets were amazing. Working together with other people [from different organisations], getting to see how they do things, having their support to think about things I’ve found difficult and helping them too.’

Participant feedback in focus group

[One thing that has worked well is...] learning about different types of alternative businesses and realising that in the end they are all mission driven and have many of the same challenges around that when growing and/or becoming more resilient’

Delivery partner reflection on G&R programme design

This cross fertilisation of ideas was possible due to the flexible way the programme was delivered, with care and support tailored to the individual in a way that suited their own experience but within the context of an understanding of the challenges facing diverse alternative business organisations.

FOUR: In person events helped establish and nurture relationships

Attendance at in person events and site visits helped establish and nurture relationships, build connections between participants and foster links between partners and participants. They were an opportunity to share learning, inspire each other and consider the wider impacts of the mission led businesses on the communities they connect with.

‘...more opportunities for in-person sessions would be good. I think also potentially connecting alumni/fellows with potential funders/partner orgs and offering introductions as a result of graduating the programme would be a nice touch’ Participant end of programme survey response



Growth & Resilience learning programme graduation and celebration event. HEART centre, Headingley, Leeds

At face-to-face events, we saw firsthand how participants and partners were able to connect with each other in ways that had been more difficult online. This really brings the impacts of the programme to life!

Participants talked about how valuable the opportunity to build more meaningful connections and foster links between partners and participants had been. An interesting point raised in site visits was that for participants, as well as delivery partners, seeing other alternative businesses' impacts and challenges in a 'warts and all' way is really powerful and helped participants to see that their own challenges are often reflective of wider systemic issues such as very high demand for their services within the context of limited resources.

'This [site visit] is excellent. Honestly, hearing about other people's experiences, especially how they are making things work despite significant challenges and having all these impacts in the community is inspiring'

Participant comment at site visit

One consistent recommendation for future in person events is that more time be given to peer-to-peer activities with opportunities for participants to have discussions. This peer-to-peer support, as it grows, in turn will strengthen and contribute to the support system for alternative businesses across West Yorkshire.



Site visit to The Chestnut Centre and the Top Club, hosted by Local Services 2 You (LS2Y), Huddersfield

FIVE: The experience for participants has been positive with significant impacts

This final learning point draws together the learning from across the evaluation. Evidence from survey responses and outcomes data, focus group discussions and feedback from participants at events suggests that the experience for participants has been largely very positive, with important, sometimes transformational, impacts for individuals involved.

Individual impacts included increased confidence, development of new knowledge and skills suited to alternative businesses, new or secured jobs, and for some implementation of new systems in their organisations.

‘It’s given me confidence to look for new markets and try new processes because I’ve seen things working for other people’

Focus group participant.

One central feature of this learning point is that the relevance and value of the G&R learning programme is at least in part due to the content being tailored to meet the needs of alternative businesses specifically.

‘I’ve found that at networking events or on training course I’m often the only person running a CIC... it’s been great not to have to explain that we are a not for profit’

‘Being with other people who are also trying to balance bringing in some income and balancing the books with providing support to the people who use our centre is empowering, kind of reassuring’

Focus group participant.

Feedback also suggests that these individual impacts will have substantial longer-term outcomes for individuals as well as the alternative businesses and wider sectors they work in. Beyond the participants

themselves, the impacts of the Growth & Resilience programme are being felt by their organisations and (to some extent although more difficult to evidence) the wider communities of West Yorkshire (see Box 2).

This intended, but previously unevidenced outcome for West Yorkshire, aligns with both the G&R learning programme and wider BfGWY programme aims and clearly contributes to the learning points discussed above and illustrated in Figure 2. Whilst not evidenced in full yet, it is clear from the significance of the programme for those involved, that they have already started acting on their learning and this is helping them strengthen their purpose driven business outcomes over the medium and longer term.

Box 2: Spotlight on positive impacts for participants is building confidence, creating resilience and having ripple effects beyond the programme

100% of programme participants increased their skills by an average of 46%

100% of programme participants improved at least one skill

100% of programme participants reported being satisfied with the support they were offered

100% of programme participants have started measuring their impacts

One of the most positive learning points from the G&R learning programme is the positive outcomes for participants across the board. We saw this across outcomes data, feedback from programme reviews, focus groups and at in-person events. Positive outcomes for participants relate to the G&R programme aims in four main ways:

- Confidence, skills and knowledge building,
- Strengthened networks and connections with others in the VCSE sector,
- Alternative business growth and organisational resilience, and
- Tackling inequality with positive impacts for marginalised communities in West Yorkshire

Participants built their own skills and knowledge as a result of the flexible support on the G&R programme. In the focus group we asked participants for their reflections on how they feel about the next 12 months having taken part. Their responses were enlightening. They told us they feel more...

Knowledgeable
 Connected
 Clued up Skilled Involved
Inspired
 Prepared Hopeful

As a learning experience, we heard that the combination of different activities – online sessions, action learning sets, individual support from coaches, and joining in person events, had helped consolidate learning and provided opportunities for them to think about their own contexts. This suggests they will be more able to continue to build on their learning:

'I feel like I have some new tools now! And even if I haven't tried everything out yet I'm confident enough that I can apply them as and when I need to.'

'Working with others on the course has really shown me I'm not alone and seeing what's working for different people gives me confidence to try things out.'

Beyond these direct impacts, participants are adopting new processes and ways of working which are already leading to changes in their organisations with benefits for the communities. This is summarised neatly by one quote from discussions at the G&R programme celebration event:

'Communities are benefitting from our resilience'

Growth & Resilience programme evaluation

In this section we present an evaluation of how the G&R programme has performed in terms of its stated aims and explore outcomes relating to those aims.

Our role and approach as independent evaluators

Nifty Sustainability CIC was commissioned in September 2024 to provide an overall evaluation of the programme. From early discussions with partners (and building on our role as independent evaluators of the wider BfGWY programme), we established a number of evaluation questions related to the overall G&R programme aims (see Appendix 1). These help delivery partners, funders and wider stakeholders understand how the programme has delivered against its aims and where there have been challenges.

As a core part of the wider BfGWY pilot programme, with its aims around exploring impacts and outcomes of the approaches being adopted, participants were asked to reflect on their experience and provide a range of feedback throughout. This included surveys at the start, middle and end points capturing outcomes and EDI data as a condition of the, otherwise free, training and support, plus opportunities to provide feedback on different programme activities (learning sessions, ALS, coaching, in person events). These activities generated quantitative data on outputs and outcomes as well rich data on participants' views on their experiences.

In evaluation research design it was especially important to consider the wellbeing of participants and potential for overwhelm/research fatigue. Within their organisations, participants typically take on a number of strategic, operational and leadership roles and so have limited time and

capacity for additional involvement. For this reason, throughout this evaluation, we have prioritised using available data where possible.

Where we did need to undertake additional research - for example to help understand the wider impacts of the programme – we used inclusive, creative and, where possible, reflective rather than extractive methods such as focus groups and reflection sessions to support participant and wider stakeholder learning, and attendance was optional. A full list of activities is available in Appendix 1.

Analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data involved looking across and delving into the different data to unearth themes and explore key learning points. This has been an iterative process of exploring the data as it emerges, looking for gaps and building an understanding of how the programme is addressing the overall aims; what has worked well and where there have been challenges.

In addition, planned activity on the wider BfGWY programme evaluation aimed at exploring outcomes at the final reporting stage for the whole programme (March 2025) will include elements focusing on G&R programme impacts beyond the end of the programme. These activities include a further reflective session with coaches and analysis of data from the outcomes survey.

How have the programme aims been achieved?

This section presents findings from the evaluation of the programme against the overarching programme aims. For each aim, we worked with delivery partners to develop a number of research questions (see Appendix 2). Table 1 below summarises outputs and outcomes for each aim to clearly highlight where different elements of the G&R programme delivered against the programme aims.

<p>Aim 1: Prioritise, encourage, support and promote alternative business enterprise in marginalised and disadvantaged communities through local VCSE networks and community knowledge.</p>	<p>Aim 2: Support existing alternative businesses to develop new services or markets, bolstering economic resilience and sustainability</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 alternative businesses completed the programme, 16 attended more than 50% of the sessions • The G&R programme is reaching marginalised and disadvantaged communities in two main ways: through recruitment of diverse participants whose alternative businesses are based in marginalised communities, and through the impacts alternative businesses have in communities • Connections with local VCSE networks have been strengthened and peer-to-peer networks are starting to form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The support offered has enabled participants to try new ways of working which in turn is helping to bolster their own and their organisations' resilience • 11 alternative businesses reported engaging in new markets • 6 adopted new technologies or processes • Beyond individual and organisational resilience, this is having 'ripple effects' in wider West Yorkshire alternative business sector
<p>Aim 3: Promote and support entrepreneurship focused on creating better quality jobs</p>	<p>Aim 4: Provide specialist support that understands and addresses alternative businesses' needs including business strategy, organisational development, raising capital, managing working capital needs, and cashflow.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New jobs have been created, and existing jobs have been secured as a result of participants' involvement in the programme • 1.92 FTE new jobs were created and 6 were safeguarded • There are gaps in understanding around the nature of jobs being created and supported and in what ways these can be thought of as 'better quality jobs', however the programme outcomes evidence supports the principle that social businesses support employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist support suited to different types of alternative businesses has been offered • Different types of alternative businesses have benefitted from participation • In person events and the action learning sets have been highlighted as being especially effective • There have been challenges around fitting content and range of topics into programme timescales • The flexible relational model helped overcome challenges around timings to ensure most relevant topics were covered

Table 1: Summary of G&R programme aims with outcomes achieved

Aim 1: Prioritise, encourage, support and promote alternative businesses in marginalised and disadvantaged communities through local VCSE networks and community knowledge.

The G&R programme reached marginalised and disadvantaged communities in two main ways: through recruitment of participants from diverse backgrounds, and via the reach and impacts of the organisations they come from and the diverse groups of beneficiaries they support.

In terms of who was reached by the programme recruitment, participants came from diverse backgrounds. Figure 3 below gives an overview of participants to illustrate who is being prioritised, supported and promoted through the programme. As shown typically marginalised and minoritised groups supported via the programme include:

- 88% of participants identify as female as compared with an average of 30% for SMEs nationally¹
- The proportion of participants identifying as LGBTQ (33%) is higher than that reported in the population (~5%)
- The majority of participants have direct lived experience of the issues their alternative businesses are addressing
- The proportion of people from global majority, minoritised ethnicities on the programme (27%) is slightly higher than the proportion for West Yorkshire as a whole (23.4%)
- Fewer Disabled people were involved in the programme (7% limited a little, none reported being limited a lot by disability) than would be expected given total Disabled population of West Yorkshire (17.6%: 9.9% limited a little; 7.7% limited a lot).

Whilst these figures show the G&R programme achieved its stated aim to prioritise, encourage, support and promote alternative businesses in marginalised and disadvantaged communities, it is worth noting that, as discussed above, there were challenges around time available to reach and recruit the most marginalised members of our communities.

A wide range of beneficiaries, members and communities are supported through the businesses on the programme. Figure 4 provides a summary of the primary beneficiary group of the alternative businesses on the programme. In addition, the majority of the alternative businesses involved are based in the areas of highest deprivation, based on indices of deprivation (IMD): 59% of the alternative businesses on the programme are based in the 30% most deprived areas of England.

The G&R programme also supported alternative businesses working across diverse environmental and social sectors with impacts clearly linked to tackling inequalities (Figure 5). Beyond their individual impacts, involvement in the G&R learning programme has helped participants to promote alternative business more widely and evidence their own and wider impacts as illustrated by these reflections from participants at the G&R Graduation and Celebration event.

‘One inspiring thing about the G&R programme has been connecting with other great people and alternative businesses’

‘Before this I didn’t know about what others are doing. I do now and it’s helping me to show how important the work is.’

¹ <https://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/knowledge/management/only-a-third-of-uk-small-business-owners-are-women/>

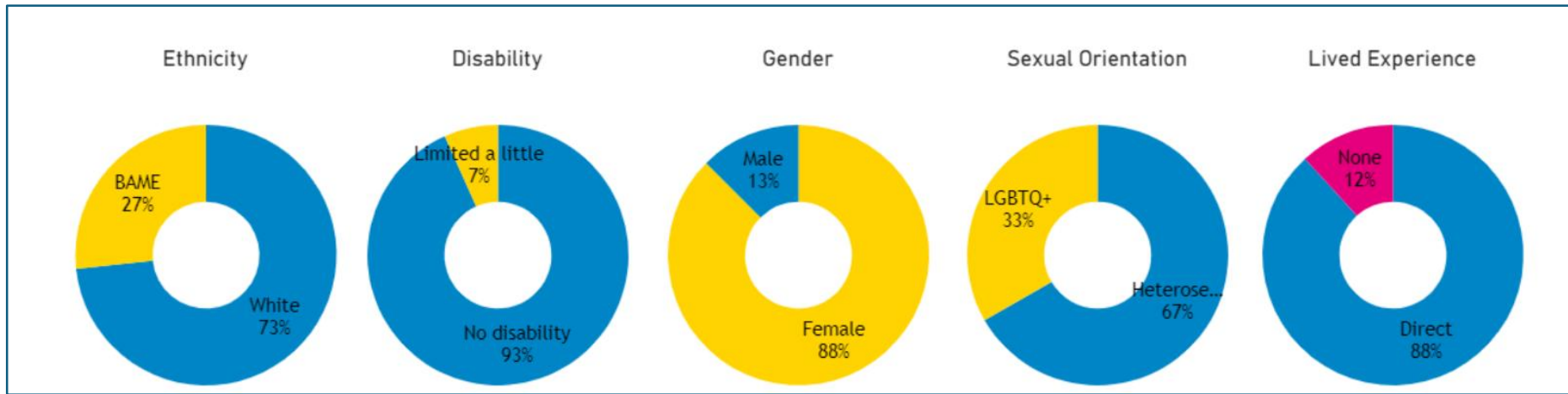


Figure 3: Proportion of participants from typically marginalised and underrepresented groups

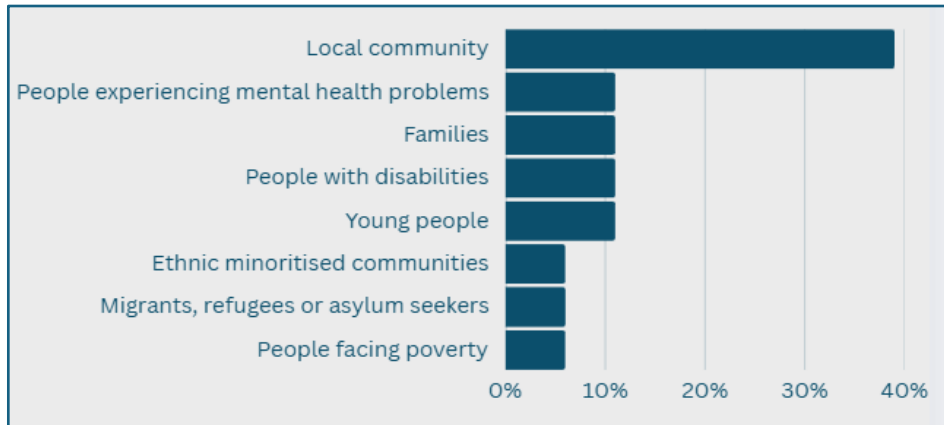


Figure 4: Beneficiary groups

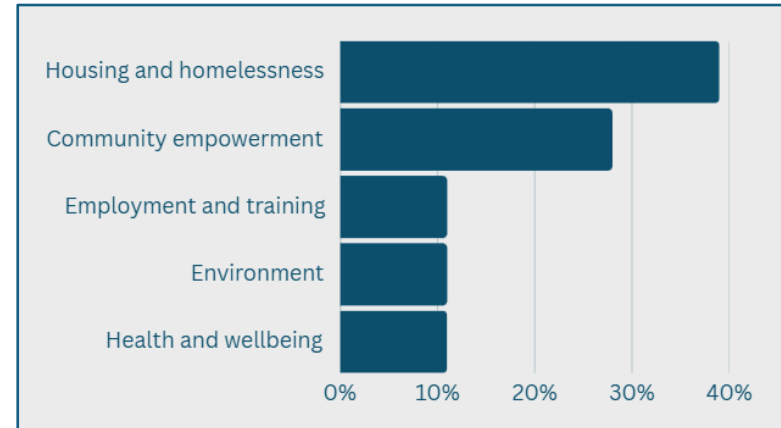
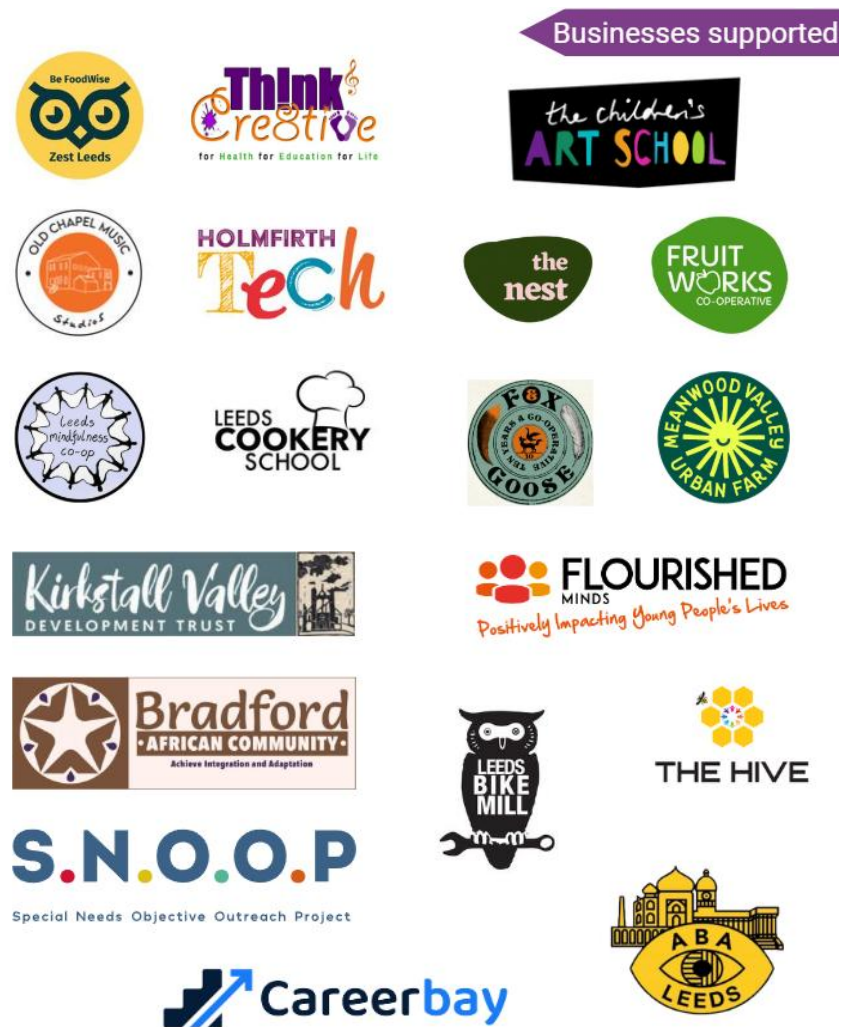


Figure 5: Social and environmental impact areas



Another key part of achieving this aim relates to connections with local VCSE networks being created or strengthened through the programme. We've seen this happening in different ways, for example where peer-to-peer connections have formed between participants or where people are sharing learning.

For participants and partners, this networking with other mission led organisations based in the region has been highlighted as a key benefit of being involved in the programme. However, some have noted that there is challenge here in terms of supporting networks beyond the end of the programme. Coaches in particular have highlighted that as support with networking - for example, signposting to support or grants or other organisations during coaching sessions or face to face events – comes to an end, there is a risk that these seedling peer-to-peer networks and connections with wider VCSE networks and community knowledge may also tail off.

'Peer to peer network is not yet self-sustaining. This takes time and resource. It won't happen overnight'

'The people I'm supporting are starting to connect with each other [through the G&R programme], but it's early days and we've seen it's different in different places'

Coaches' reflections in focus group

Finally, as we considered this aim, delivery partners were especially keen to explore whether there have been differences in the experiences of different types of organisations – e.g. co-operatives or social enterprises. As noted above, evidence from surveys, programme feedback and observations at events suggests that participants from across different types of alternative businesses have been engaged and involved and have equally benefitted from taking part.



Growth & Resilience programme participants from different types of alternative businesses reaching diverse communities across West Yorkshire

Aim 2: Support existing alternative businesses to develop new services or markets, bolstering economic resilience and sustainability.

Evidence in support of this aim comes from two main sources: outcomes data and feedback from the focus group with participants.

Outcomes data includes:

- 11 alternative businesses reported engaging in new markets
- 6 adopted new technologies or processes
- 100% of programme participants reported being satisfied with the support they were offered
- 100% of G&R programme participants increased their skills by an average of 46%

During the focus group, we asked participants to reflect on how and in what ways involvement in the programme had supported them to grow or become more resilient. Responses (see Figure 6) included:

- Focusing on planning and taking a more strategic approach
- Being able to focus on and demonstrate impact and the value of their alternative businesses to the local economy
- Having confidence to try new ways of reaching different markets
- Building new systems and procedures to support business development and/or resilience
- Increasing collaboration with other alternative businesses in ways that enhance sustainability
- Enabling others in the team to take the lead and so reduce own pressure and overwhelm

We also heard from coaches and participants, that the learning from the programme will support them into the future:

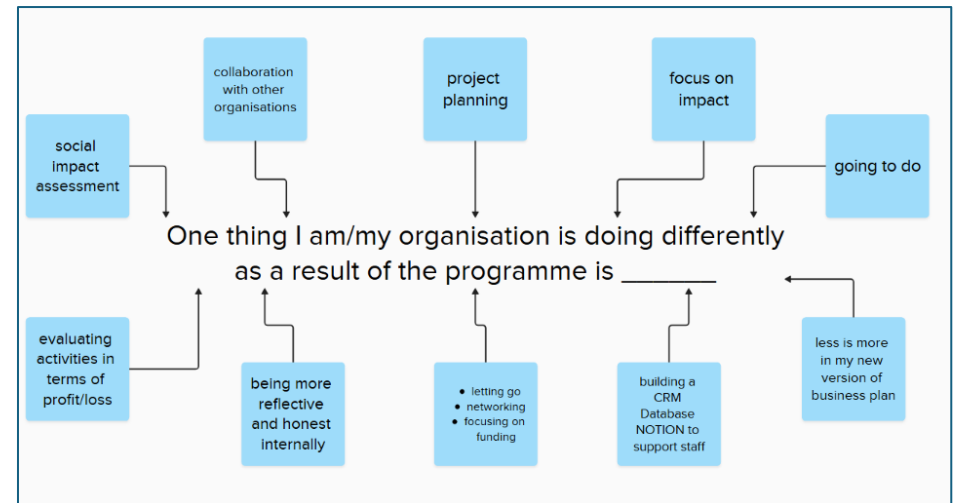


Figure 6: Focus group participants responses.

In the focus group follow up discussion, the overarching view was that being involved in the programme had already had impacts and participants' learning, increased confidence, skills and knowledge would continue to help build their own and their organisations resilience.

Aim 3: Promote and support entrepreneurship focused on creating better quality jobs

How the programme has achieved this aim is more challenging to evidence. Outcomes data from interim and end of programme surveys shows that ~2 new jobs were created and 6 jobs were safeguarded as a result of the G&R programme.

However, it's not clear in what ways these are 'better quality' jobs or whether they will be sustainable into the longer term. What we can say with confidence is that this aim connects with the wider Business for

Good West Yorkshire programme and the potential for alternative business to support good quality, fair work.

Aim 4: Provide specialist support that understands and addresses alternative businesses' needs including business strategy, organisational development, raising capital, managing working capital needs, and cashflow.

Specialist support geared towards the needs of alternative businesses was delivered via:

- Five half day learning sessions (see Figure 7)
- Three Action Learning Sets
- Access to specialist coach
- Optional site visit



Figure 7: Topics specialist support that understands and addresses alternative businesses' needs

The sessions were facilitated and delivered by topic experts with specialist knowledge of the issues in the context of alternative businesses. In some sessions, topics covered were voted on by participants so as to be most relevant to the needs of the group. In addition, participants were able to access a resource platform during the G&R programme and, as graduates, can access the resources available after programme completion.

Participant feedback from each session together with reflections in the focus group suggest a high level of satisfaction with the programme delivery as reflected by these quotes in feedback.

'I am grateful for taking part in the programme, it has really boosted my confidence to have a foundation of knowledge in areas I previously felt I had no ability and I now feel more able to give things a go.'

'It was extremely useful and beneficial in helping me to find innovative solutions to challenges and strategies for advancing my social enterprise. The sessions provided a structured, supportive environment where we shared real world obstacles and received constructive feedback... This approach built my problem solving skills and helped me gain a deeper understanding of my social enterprise's needs.'

'I don't want them to stop and I will miss them. Truly inspiring, interesting and informative'

As illustrated in both Boxes 1 and 2, this support has been appropriate to participants across different types of alternative businesses and different sectors of work, and importantly, has led to increased skills, knowledge, capacity and confidence amongst participants.

Looking ahead

Now that the Growth & Resilience programme has come to an end, partners are using the programme learning to reflect on how best to further develop and support alternative businesses in West Yorkshire. This section draws together the experiences of delivery partners and participants and evidence around outcomes to provide suggestions for what to focus on as part of that process of looking ahead.

Figure 8 below summarises, what's been difficult or where there have been significant challenges (red), what's worked but been challenging (amber), and what's clearly worked well (green).

Red: The key challenge in delivering the programme relates to tight timescales and limited resources. Whilst delivery partners found ways to address these challenges, this may have impacted outcomes in terms of recruitment to the programme and extent of topics covered.

Amber: A lot went well with the programme, and sets the foundation for further work. As the programme moves forward, it would be good to build on the learning and consider:

- Extending timescales including allowing additional resources and time in early stages of project set up to allow delivery partners and wider stakeholders to use their networks to increase connections with marginalised communities. This would enable earlier matching with coaches as a key part of the relational model.
- Capacity building grants to support participants during their time on the programme.

Green: The G&R programme has delivered against its aims and worked really well with individual and wider impacts. The partnership approach to design and delivery was key to programme success, and in person

opportunities to connect and network supported participants and partners. It's clear that focused but flexible support geared towards meeting the specific needs of alternative businesses works for building confidence in individuals and as seen in wider literature, this in turn supports alternative, mission led businesses to grow, thrive and become more resilient.

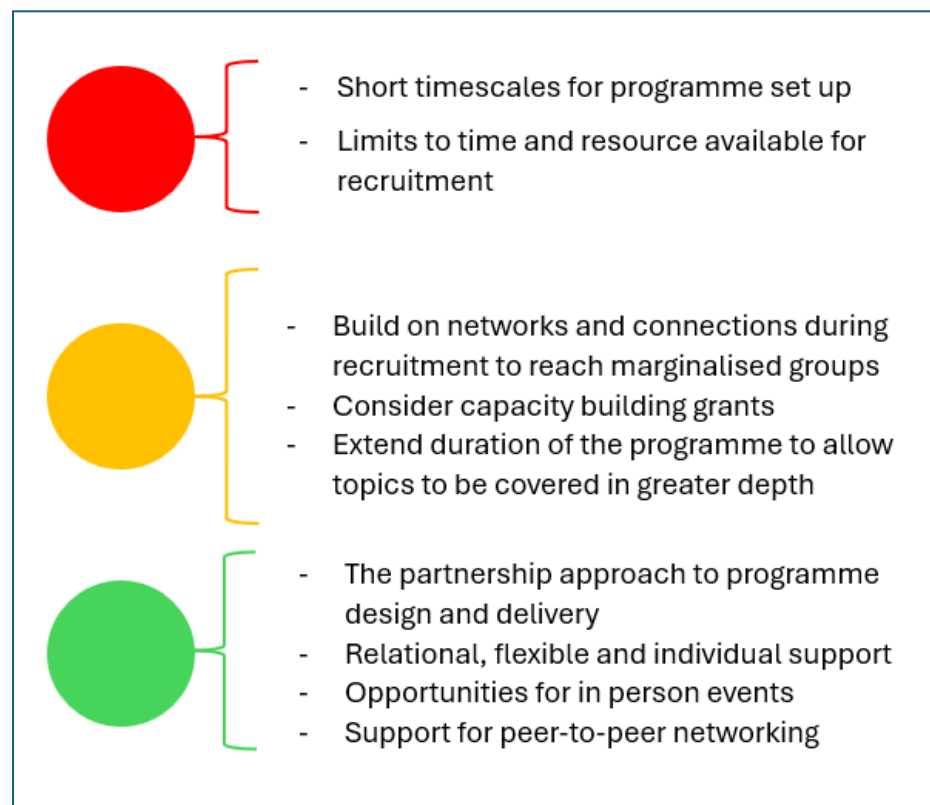


Figure 8: Red, amber, green. What to stop, what to proceed with but with caution, what to do more of.

Summary

This report presents key learning and reflections relating to the strengths and benefits of the partnership approach, the positive, sometimes transformative, experience of participants, and, with reference to how the programme connects with wider Business for Good West Yorkshire innovations, the learning for partners, and the potential wider 'ripple effects' for alternative business and communities of West Yorkshire. It also flags where there have been challenges and demonstrates that the partnership approach has created efficiencies in tackling these.

As a pilot programme working within constrained timelines, the Growth & Resilience support programme has demonstrated the potential for transformational change as a result of this type of flexible, specific and relevant support for alternative business participants. Together the delivery partners have demonstrated with a track record of delivery, appropriate experience and specific understanding of the needs of alternative businesses. This has created value, efficiencies and allowed challenges to be tackled in a supportive environment. There is great learning and much to build on for future programmes and for those involved in allocating funding.

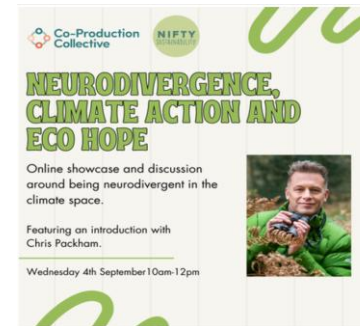


Hello! We are Nifty Sustainability CIC, a micro social enterprise established in 2019 by Claire Bastin and Jen Dyer. We support diverse groups and organisations who are trying to create meaningful change for the benefit of people, planet and prosperity. We are happiest when trialling creative and innovative

methods with different groups, because we know from experience that this helps to empower and amplify less heard voices. We have three key strands of work, all based around sustainability:

- **Research and evaluation:** we support a range of VCSE and wider public, education and health organisations in evaluating their processes and impacts and developing their policy and practice through in-depth, creative research practices.
- **Learning:** we work with organisations to support them to embed eco, social and economic sustainability into their practices. We also seek to offer capacity building in areas of sustainability to those we work with.
- **Engagement, inclusion, and activism:** the way we work is as important as what we do. As a community interest company, we seek to make a positive difference through our research and learning. We also do pro bono work and use a portion of any profits for community projects to encourage inclusive activism.

We would love to hear from like-minded folk. Whether you are keen to enquire about our services, share resources, work with us, or simply to say hello, please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Instagram](#) and / or sign up for our [newsletter](#), or just drop us a line info@niftysustainability.org.uk



Appendices

Appendix 1: Research methods

- Desk top review of relevant reports and summaries (including BfGWY reports where content is also related to G&R)
- Analysis of available participant data
- Attended and participated in events:
 - Site visit to Local Services to You in Huddersfield (The Chestnut Centre and The Top Club Huddersfield)
 - G&R celebration event at HEART in Headingley
 - 2 * G&R learning sessions
- Facilitated in person and online research activities:
 - An interactive focus group with participants exploring their experiences, learning and outcomes
 - A world café table discussions with participants, delivery partners, coaches and wider stakeholders (part of the G&R celebration event)
 - Reflective session(s) with delivery partners

Appendix 2: Research questions and sub-questions

<p>Aim: Prioritise, encourage, support and promote alternative businesses in marginalised and disadvantaged communities through local VCSE networks and community knowledge.</p>	<p>Aim: Support existing alternative businesses to develop new services or markets, bolstering economic resilience and sustainability</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How and in what ways is the G&R programme reaching marginalised and disadvantaged communities? • Have connections with local VCSE networks been strengthened? How and in what ways • Who is being ‘prioritised, encouraged, supported and promoted’? Who is not being reached? Where are there gaps? E.g. place/geography, demography? • Have the experiences participants from different types of alternative businesses differed? If so, how and in what ways across different elements of the programme? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has been the experience of existing/established ABs on the programme in terms developing new services or markets? • Are there differences between the experiences of different types of ABs in terms of developing new services or markets? • What outcomes are ABs observing around bolstered economic resilience and sustainability? Are these already happening or potential future outcomes?
<p>Aim: Promote and support entrepreneurship focused on creating better quality jobs</p>	<p>Aim: Provide specialist support that understands and addresses alternative businesses’ needs including business strategy, organisational development, raising capital, managing working capital needs, and cashflow.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are ABs recruiting new/supporting existing jobs as a result of their involvement in the programme? If so, what sort of jobs? If not, do they have plans to? • What barriers and challenges are there to creating better quality jobs? • How and in what ways does ‘better quality jobs’ connect with Q1 and wider BfGWY programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specialist support has been offered? (NB: connects with overall BfGWY programme objectives) • Have the experiences of different types of alternative businesses differed in terms of specialist support needs? • What has worked well? Where have there been challenges?