

Aster Foundation Impact Report

2023 / 2024

ASTER
FOUNDATION

We enable
better lives





Our 2023 / 2024 impact

As we reflect on our journey over the past year, we are immensely proud to share with you the impact we've collectively achieved to combat the causes and effects of poverty, enabling better lives.

Our mission is to deliver short term initiatives and longer-term impact programmes which tackle the causes and effects of poverty. All of which are supported by our wonderful volunteers, our social research programme and social incubator, inc.

This year has been particularly challenging for our communities. The inequality gap has widened in many areas, the cost-of-living crisis has deepened and the poverty premium has been responsible for many moving further and further into financial exclusion. We recognise that poverty presents in many ways, impacting individuals differently and often disproportionately. Whether it's through financial marginalisation, employment insecurity, mental health challenges, or social isolation, the effects of poverty are evident across the communities we work in, which is why we aspire to work with one in three of those people. This report will share how we have been meeting our aspirations through 2023.



Our
purpose
is to

Enable better lives through
combatting poverty.

Our **mission** is to deliver short term initiatives and longer-term **impact programmes** that tackle the causes and effects of **poverty** and **enable better lives.**

Our five big facts



2,457

people were supported to be financially included



241

people have had support with improving their chances of employment



4,921

people were positively impacted by Aster Foundation programmes in 2023 / 2024*

*(over 16,391 people since 2021)



115

people have volunteered their time to support people across our communities



2,223

people have been supported with their mental wellness or social connectivity

Mental Wellness and Social Connectivity

Improving the mental wellness and social connectivity of 400,000 people by 2030

2,223 people were supported with their mental wellness or social connectivity.

- ♥ **44** people were trained to become a mental health champion (with a further 26 receiving mental health first aid refresher training)
- ♥ **Five** local organisations benefited from our 'pay-it-forward' model, which funds training for local organisations which align to our mission - who otherwise would not be able to afford training
- ♥ We reached **86** people through digital content aimed at educating people on their mental health
- ♥ **31** people received 1-2-1 counselling from our trained psychotherapist
- ♥ For the first time, we delivered a certified ADHD coaching programme to nine people
- ♥ Our Mental Wellness courses have an average rating of **4.7** out of **5**
- ♥ Each attendee of the course will, on average, go on to support a further three people in the community with their mental health, which means our training has impacted over **3,000** people across our communities.



Feedback for our courses:

“It made me think more about how to keep my mind more active in a positive way.”

“I just wanted to say how much I have enjoyed your training sessions on Emotional Resilience and Physical Intelligence. They have been informative, stimulating, and superbly delivered. Thank you very much indeed.”

“I thoroughly enjoyed this course and have come away feeling that I have learnt so much more about mental health and how best to approach conversations with someone who is struggling/in need of help.”

“The session was very well structured. The trainer covered some difficult subjects very sensitively and made the information very accessible. Separating the session in to two mornings worked very well as it gives time to consider the session from that day and prepare for the next session.”

“The course has given me such great tools for speaking to someone who may need mental health first aid. I'm definitely going to encourage as many people as I can to do it, as I think what I've taken away is invaluable. The course was interactive.”



Financial Inclusivity

Improving the financial wellbeing of 300,000 people by 2030 through targeted guidance and access to support

2,457 people were supported to be financially included.

- ♥ **1,447** referrals were made for social housing customers to the Financial Wellbeing team
- ♥ **61** people were supported through successful grant applications
- ♥ **418** successful applications were made to the Aster Group hardship fund
- ♥ **232** disability benefit advice cases for people to access the money they are entitled to
- ♥ **237** cases to support beneficiaries to manage their income
- ♥ **179** foodbank referrals for families in poverty
- ♥ **709** people provided with general benefit advice
- ♥ **£659,628** was the total value of benefit applications and appeals won for beneficiaries
- ♥ **658** people made use of digital content to support their financial position during the year.



Feedback:

“If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have the quality of life I have now or the flat that I'm in and I really appreciate all your support.”

“Thank you so much for your help. You and all at Aster have been amazing. You just don't realise the help that is actually out there. I've been so lucky.”



Employment

Improving the chance of employment for 300,000 people by 2030 through removing barriers which exist

241 people have had support with improving their chances of employment.

- ♥ **33** people moved into employment through our Into Work Officer
- ♥ **149** people sustained employment in the social businesses we supported through the 2022 / 2023 inc. programme
- ♥ **59** people have received learning and skills through our digital college and other initiatives.

“ Feedback:

“Sometimes all it takes is for someone to believe in you, so you can believe in yourself. I am so excited about my new role and I am excited about my family’s future.”

“I never thought 12 months ago I would be in the position I am now. I love my job and love that I am setting an example that you can follow your dreams.”

“My mental health has improved massively since being in work and I feel so much more positive.”



Enablers

Volunteering

115 people volunteered their time across our communities.

- ♥ **53** new volunteers registered on our volunteering programme
- ♥ **142** hours were volunteered on projects in our communities supporting social connectivity, wellbeing and sustainability.



“ Feedback:

“I recently attended as a volunteer at a sheltered scheme in Pewsey. We provided refreshments and I assisted with welcoming customers and serving them, I also facilitated part of the mental health session for Daran. As part of my role, I carry out inspections of schemes and sometimes meet customers but rarely have a chance to interact with them. This gave me the opportunity to sit down and generally talk with customers, it was a fab day, I learnt lots from the sessions and also from our customers in a friendly relaxed manner.”

“Thank you for making it happen! Really grounded me and was so invigorating, met some fantastic people, colleagues and customers, and really feel we made a difference to the area we worked on, sprucing and enhancing it so that hopefully customers will enjoy it all the more through the best months of the year ahead.”

”

Enablers

inc.

We have so far supported 42 social businesses through our inc. programme. 93% of these are still strong and viable businesses with 12 making their way through the programme in 2023.

Our social incubator, inc. works with those who want to tackle the root cause of poverty in creative and innovative ways. The businesses on the cohort will align to one of our priority areas: mental wellness and social connectivity, financial inclusion, employment, as well as sustainability and the green agenda. During the 10-month programme, our inc. entrepreneurs deliver impact pilots across our local communities.

The latest businesses on the cohort all align to one of our priority areas: mental wellness and social connectivity (this includes the green agenda due to its positive effect on mental health), financial inclusion, employment, and sustainability.

- ♥ We have expanded our digital footprint and developed a thriving online community, with plans to further expand this in 2025/26
- ♥ **121** people across our communities had measurable improvements to their lives through inc.
- ♥ **5,055** people were engaged by the current cohort through areas such as research or volunteering
- ♥ inc. has launched a LinkedIn community group with **72** members so far
- ♥ inc. held eight inc.spiration sessions which are sessions aimed at troubleshooting common business problems
- ♥ **12** businesses successfully graduated
- ♥ The current cohort have attracted **£783,000** of funding while on inc.
- ♥ A total of **107** hours of coaching were invested into our inc. cohort.



Enablers

inc.



Feedback:

“Janine and I want to express our heartfelt gratitude for the Educafe Blueprint Experience that you facilitated under Aster Group’s inc. programme last week. The two days we spent together provided not only a much-needed respite from our daily routines but also a profound opportunity to reflect on Educafe’s journey and explore its future potential.

By the end of the second day, not only were we energised and excited about the future, but we also felt an immense pride in what we have already accomplished. We know there’s much work ahead, but we now have a clear pathway.”

Clare Middleton and Janine Ford

“Thank you so much for all of the introductions. Getting to talk to professionals in Aster has supported our business’s development massively.”

Tom Bartrop, SuperFi

“The 121 in person support being offered through inc. has supported my confidence and belief that I can turn my business into a reality.”

Catherine Ashworth, Pandora’s Be Curious



Social Circles

Supporting older people and those with physical or mental impairment to reclaim their outdoor space, allowing them to access nature in their own gardens or communal areas. Social Circles delivered a sustainable garden improvement service model for ten Aster customers in Somerset, offering support to maintain their homes, improve their mental health and feelings of social connectivity.

Educafe

EduCafe, are a vibrant community hub thriving in West Berkshire, bringing together English learners, parents, local residents, and volunteers. Collaborating with local services, their focus centres on nurturing togetherness, inclusion, and wellbeing. Their vision is dedicated to forging welcoming, supported, and interconnected communities.



Enablers

inc.

Case study:

One of our social businesses, **100 ways in 100 days** developed a behavioural change platform, which teaches people how to become more sustainable, live a greener lifestyle and also save money at the same time. **74** Aster customers engaged in the learning and as **60%** of 'Ways' are cost-cutters, over **4 in 5** said "Saves me up to £10 per week", that's **£520** a year and more than **1 in 6** said: "Saves me up to £25 per week", that's **£1,300** a year. In a cost-of-living crisis, this is an incredibly supportive tool for customers to have access to.

"I never seem to have time to stop and think how I could change my lifestyle to make my little difference to help take responsibility for sustainable life. This 100 Ways has quickly got me into it. I've already taken action and I haven't even got out of bed yet!"

Feedback from beneficiaries

157%
increase

'Always' turn off lights or appliances I'm not actively using

33%
increase

'Always' use re-usable water bottle over single use bottle

133%
increase

'Always' donate or sell, rather than recycle or throw away unwanted clothing

60%
increase

'Never' throw away unused food

75%
decrease

'Never' use bar soap over liquid soap

80%
increase

'Most of the time, or always' buy second hand items

50%
increase

'Most of the time, or always' repair items rather than replacing

The Partners

McAndrew Martin

McAndrew Martin provides engineering and surveying services for the construction industry. They agreed to become the strategic partner for inc. in March 2023 and made a significant contribution to support the programme. This financial support has meant, inc. have been able to continue to develop social businesses working to bring about change around our key priority areas, as well as being integral to the growth of the incubator at the start of the current cohort (23/24).

As well as this, McAndrew Martin have been hands on in their support, both in mentoring cohort members as well as supporting inc. events.

The partnership continues to thrive, and they have recently made a further significant donation in support of the ongoing progress of inc. to take us to the end of the current financial year.

Transparity

Transparity is a UK-based Microsoft partner that offers cloud, cyber security, data and AI, and app innovation solutions. They have a strong ethos of working within communities to deliver their social value.

In June 2023 they made a significant contribution and signed up to become our strategic partner for the volunteering programme. Thanks to this generous donation, the Aster Foundation has been able to engage with 53 new volunteers, and manage 115 volunteers signing up to our opportunities.



The **Aster Foundation** was created by **Aster Group** in response to government welfare policy changes in 2016 and increasing inequalities across the UK and Aster communities; to highlight the additional work carried out by the Group to create social impact in the places which needed it the most.

The **Foundation** operated as a department within **Aster** for nearly three years and within this time has positively impacted thousands of people. Becoming a **charitable entity** in 2021 allowed us to amplify our impact further, enabling the better lives of our people and communities through our work to **combat poverty**.

With special thanks to our partners...
without you we simply wouldn't exist.

Littlefields Supplies Ltd
Capsticks
Novus Solutions
Axis Elevators
TH White
Allia C&C / Chatham Financial

With special thanks to those who have given their time to our inc. programme...

Javan Bramhall (Digital Glue); **Kam Chauhan** (Kam Chauhan Outsourced Marketing); **Sarah Damani** (Alchemy Virtual Assistance); **Danielle MacLeod** (Remarkable Woman); **Olay Yakzhina** (Switchee); **Laura Wood** (Invisible Creations); **Paul Butterworth** (Ashford Law LLP); **Nic Devlin** (Remarkable Woman); **Tommy Gentleman** (Tide 55); **Alison Edgar MBE** (Alison Edgar); **Hannah Sprake** (Sporting Insights); Everyone at **We are Resource** and **McAndrew Martin**.

To our inc. Mentors

Rachel Credidio, Emma O Shea, Amanda Williams, Jane Gallifent, Tommy Gentleman, Daniel Chidley, Javan Bramhall, Sharon Bye, and Daran Bailey.

Others who have supported us with the gift of time and / or skills:

Sev Niyazi, Lucy Pellow, Barbara Dunne, Lorraine Adams, Clive Wathen, Sharon Bye, Richard Boyne, Thomas Quick, Ricky Franklin, Matt Hale, Andy Isted, Felicity Newman, Jordan Lister, Emily Lawrence, Gill Newbury, Darren Brazil, Bjorn Howard, Jules Stanbridge, and Chris Gibbs.

www.aster.co.uk/foundation

Aster Foundation is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) registered charity number 1198145



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