



power to
change

business in
community
hands

B-INSPIRED PROFILE

EMPOWERING
PLACES

September 2023

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ABOUT **POWER TO CHANGE**



Power to Change is the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.

ABOUT **RENAISI**



Renaisi is a social enterprise that helps people and places thrive by challenging the root causes of economic and social exclusion across the UK. They do this by empowering people to overcome barriers to employment, enabling social and private sector organisations to tackle socio-economic exclusion, challenging systems that perpetuate exclusion, and embodying approaches that lead to sustainable change.

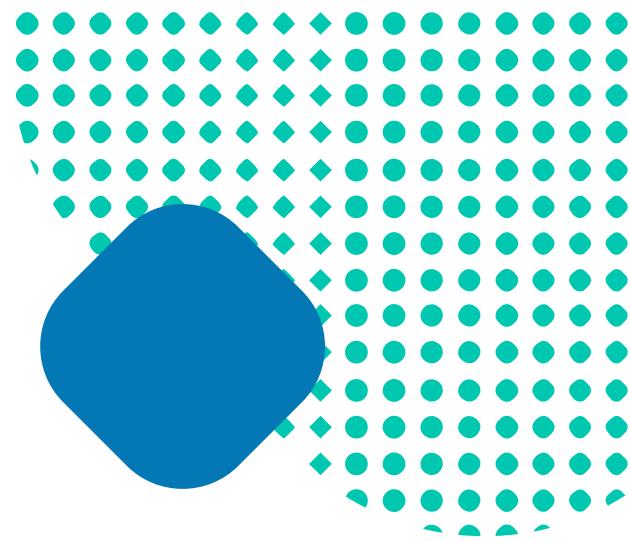


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INTRODUCTION

Empowering Places was designed by [Power to Change](#) as an experiment to explore what happens when local anchor organisations are supported to catalyse community businesses in deprived communities in England.^{1,2}

The programme took much of what Power to Change knew about supporting the development of community businesses in other programmes. It applied this to a place, considering how the interplay between place, people and community businesses could build more resilient and prosperous communities.

The programme hypothesised that building the capacity of specific, existing local organisations could enable them to catalyse and support the growth of new community businesses. In turn, these community businesses would support and develop the social economy of their communities. The programme provided a blend of funding and capacity-building support to locally rooted ‘catalyst’ organisations in six areas of high deprivation to test this idea:³

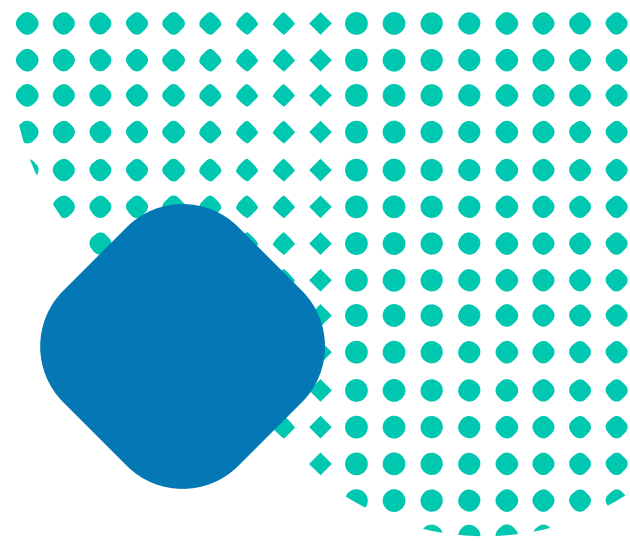
- [B-inspired](#) in Braunstone, Leicester
- [Centre4](#) in Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park, Grimsby
- [Made in Manningham](#), incubated by [Participate](#) in Manningham, Bradford⁴
- [Real Ideas](#) in Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth
- [The Wharton Trust](#) in Dyke House, Hartlepool
- [Wigan and Leigh Community Charity](#) (WLCC), formally Abram Ward Community Cooperative, in Abram, Wigan

Power to Change’s decision to invest in these places was a choice to support and empower local people to shape delivery based on local priorities, meaning the context and the realities of each place play a significant part of how the programme looks and feels in those areas.

This profile for B-inspired in Braunstone, Leicester, is one of six and draws on data and insight from the beginning of the programme (July 2017) to January 2023, including:

- the socio-economic context of Braunstone, and Leicester more broadly, drawing on publicly available datasets and findings from research on the area
- monitoring data from the programme and feedback from qualitative interviews with Power to Change, delivery partners, catalyst staff and community businesses
- information about the catalyst – B-inspired – and its Empowering Places journey.⁵

This profile is designed to tell the story of the Empowering Places investment in Braunstone, Leicester. Together with the other five profiles in the suite, it helps to build a picture of the similarities and differences in context and approaches across the Empowering Places areas.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

B-inspired is a large and well-established community organisation which chose to incubate a small number of targeted community businesses, largely within a central community hub. B-inspired's strong connections with the community and highly supportive approach to catalysing its community businesses have proven successful, and all but one of the community businesses it supported are currently trading successfully.⁶

This profile explores the social, economic and demographic context of the Braunstone area; B-inspired's approach to delivering Empowering Places and the programme's impact on the catalyst, community businesses and wider community; and the outlook for Braunstone's community businesses.

Key points

- The Braunstone Estate is a highly deprived area to the west of Leicester comprised largely of social housing but with very little infrastructure and no high street.
- The Braunstone catalyst, B-inspired, is a neighbourhood-based charity with a trading arm which owns several local assets.
- B-inspired's vision for Empowering Places was to make Braunstone home to a thriving and integrated community business sector with The Grove facility at its heart.
- B-inspired took a rigorous, hands-on, incubation approach to supporting its community businesses which was welcomed by community business staff and has proven successful, but was time intensive for B-inspired as a catalyst.
- Five community businesses have been successfully established in Braunstone, four of which are located within a central community hub. After a challenging few years, all the community businesses are currently running as independent enterprises that also support each other and offer a diverse range of employment, volunteering opportunities and services not previously available to local residents.
- Being a part of the Empowering Places programme has enabled B-inspired to take on The Grove as a community hub, has enabled the organisation to have a new focus on community business, enabled it to develop new partnerships and to diversify the roles and skills of its staff.
- The community businesses that are being developed would not have existed in their current form without Empowering Places, and community business staff have found the support and training provided through the programme to be very valuable. The development of The Grove has also helped provide the community with a hub and services that were previously lacking, including much needed activities for children and young people.
- The future for B-inspired and its businesses looks strong. B-inspired has lots of plans for The Grove and, despite the challenging economic climate, many of the community businesses are trading well.

1.

GUIDE TO SOURCES OF DATA AND INSIGHT



The English Indices of Deprivation, managed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, provide a comprehensive measure of relative deprivation in small areas or neighbourhoods called lower-layer super output areas (LSOAs) in England. The Index of Multiple Deprivation is based on 39 separate indicators organised across seven domains of deprivation. The domains are combined and weighted to produce an overall measure of multiple deprivation experienced by people living in an area. Every LSOA in England is ranked based on their level of deprivation relative to other areas.⁷

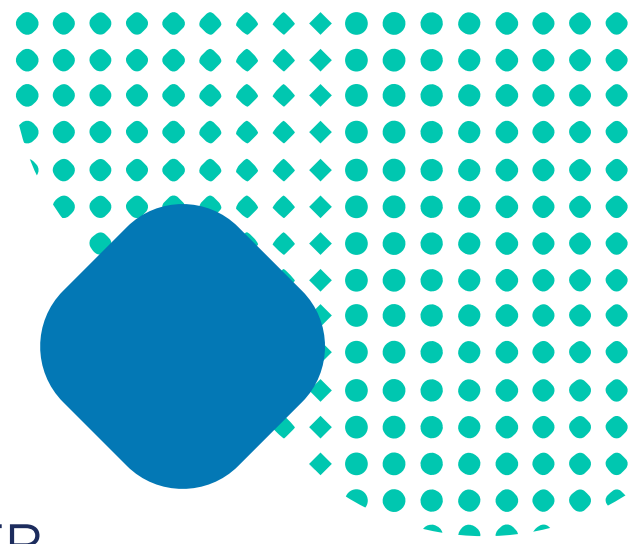
Local Insight is a hub for place-based neighbourhood level data to help decision-makers in organisations working for social good. It is provided by Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI), a spin-out consultancy from Oxford University, and holds more than 1,000 neighbourhood level indicators drawing together social, economic and demographic data from more than 50 sources.⁸

The Thriving Places Index draws on a broad range of indicators in public sector datasets measuring key factors that influence wellbeing. The index is managed by the not-for-profit place-based consultancy the Centre for Thriving Places, and provides a comparative 'dashboard' of measures under three broad categories – local conditions, equality and sustainability – with a more detailed breakdown of factors driving the distinctive local experience.⁹

Place Analytics distils thousands of datasets on people, businesses, markets and the environment, providing insight into the performance of places and the levers that fundamentally affect them. It is provided by specialist business advisors Grant Thornton UK to help organisations across all sectors contribute to building a vibrant economy, by creating places where people and businesses can flourish.¹⁰

UK Social Fabric Index maps community strength in different parts of the UK, and is produced by Onward – a non-profit think tank supported by Power to Change. The index analyses data in four categories – economic value, relationships, positive norms and physical infrastructure – each drawing on several comparative measures of local community experience.¹¹

The programme evaluation took a realist approach to understanding impact and what has contributed to it, focusing on the experiences of those involved. It drew mainly on interviews and video ethnography with catalysts, community businesses, tech leads and stakeholders in the local areas, and interviews with programme delivery leads at Power to Change and Co-operatives UK. Researchers tracked relevant findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the development and impact of the programme.



2. **BRAUNSTONE, LEICESTER**

2.1 Context

The Braunstone Estate in the ward of Braunstone Park and Rowley Fields sits to the west of Leicester. The area contains social housing developed in the 1930s and has a large amount of green space, with one of the largest parks in the city, and facilities including a library, health centre and leisure centre. However, it doesn't have a formal high street or supermarket and there are very few shops offering groceries or other basic provisions in the immediate area.

Before the Empowering Places programme there was neither a second-hand shop nor pub.

Leicester has an Index of Multiple Deprivation average score rank of 32 and has at least one neighbourhood in the 10 per cent most deprived areas in the country.¹²

Local insight - Braunstone¹³	
Population	20,069
Household income, after housing costs England average: £27,311	£20,632
White British (%) England: 79.8%	74.5%
Age under 25 (%) England: 31%	36.8%
Age 65+ (%) England: 18.2%	11.8%

B-Inspired profile Empowering Places

Thriving Places Index ¹⁴	Leicester
Health equality e.g. life expectancy at birth	7.16
Mental and physical health e.g. child obesity rate, conceptions in under 18s, illness and disability, prevalence of depression, anxiety and other health indicators	4.40
Education and learning e.g. adults with no qualifications, life-long learning, educational attainment of children, childcare quality and school readiness	3.83
Work and local economy e.g. income deprivation affecting different sections of the population, employment and percentage with low income	3.55
Place and environment local environment, housing, transport and safety, e.g. green land cover, air pollution, journey times to key services, housing affordability ratio and crime severity index	5.66
Subjective happiness Life satisfaction scores from Measures of National Well-being Dashboard: Quality of Life in the UK (ONS)	7.3

Index scores range from 0 to 10. Scores are colour coded to reflect how an area scores compared with others in England, with higher scores indicating that a place is doing better in that domain.

Key: ● Very low (below 3.5) ● Below average (3.5–4.5) ● Medium (4.5–5.5)
● Above average (5.5–6.5) ● Very high (above 6.5)

Place Analytics: Local authority area compared with England average ¹⁵	Leicester
Housing affordability	60%–80%
Community assets	80%–100%
Employment rate (age 16–64)	Lowest 5%
Business formation	80%–100%
Happiness and wellbeing	Lowest 20%

Each category is benchmarked using multiple measures and scored (in percentile form) relative to other catalyst areas. The higher the score, the better the place performed.

Percentile key: ● 80–100% Very high ● 60–80% High ● 40–60% Above average ● 20–40% Average
● 5–20% Low ● <5% Very low

UK Social Fabric Index ¹⁶						
Local authority	Social fabric score	Relationship score	Physical infrastructure	Civic institutions	Economic value	Positive social norms
Leicester	0.42	0.21	0.59	0.49	0.36	0.45
Plymouth	0.45	0.30	0.53	0.46	0.49	0.47
Hartlepool	0.37	0.24	0.48	0.38	0.44	0.33
North East Lincolnshire	0.38	0.27	0.50	0.38	0.40	0.36
Bradford	0.43	0.28	0.58	0.43	0.43	0.43
Wigan	0.46	0.33	0.57	0.45	0.53	0.45

Scores are graded from zero to one, with those closer to one indicating the stronger social fabric.

Social fabric score: strength of social fabric across all five threads: relationship, physical infrastructure, civic institutions, economic value and positive social norms

Relationship score: clusters of social groups of people in communities and community-owned assets

Physical infrastructure: physical assets in communities which facilitate, structure and organise people within a community

Civic institutions: health of democracy and governance at both local and national level, considering quality, trust and satisfaction

Economic value: tangible assets which hold a monetary and/or economic value to an individual or family within a community

Positive social norms: personal wellbeing and cultural attitudes of individuals and families in a community, including people's wider habits, behaviours and activities

Key: The colour coding reflects the comparative performance of each place in each category. The highest score for each category is dark green, the lowest is dark red.

Community

A Power to Change survey of people in Braunstone in 2020 (published in 2021) found that 82 per cent of people said their friends were not all from the same ethnic group, and 72 per cent of residents surveyed think people from different backgrounds get on well.¹⁷

A third (34%) of those surveyed in 2020 also felt that they could influence decisions affecting their local area – this was up almost 10 per cent from 2018.

Between 2018 and 2020, people's satisfaction with local services increased.

Challenges

The 2020 survey in Braunstone found:¹⁸

- trust decreased significantly in the neighbourhood between 2018 and 2020 with 10 per cent of people feeling that no one could be trusted – up from 3 per cent in 2018
- fewer people reporting they got involved in helping out with local activities (down from 9 per cent to 4 per cent between 2018 and 2020), and formal volunteering also decreased.

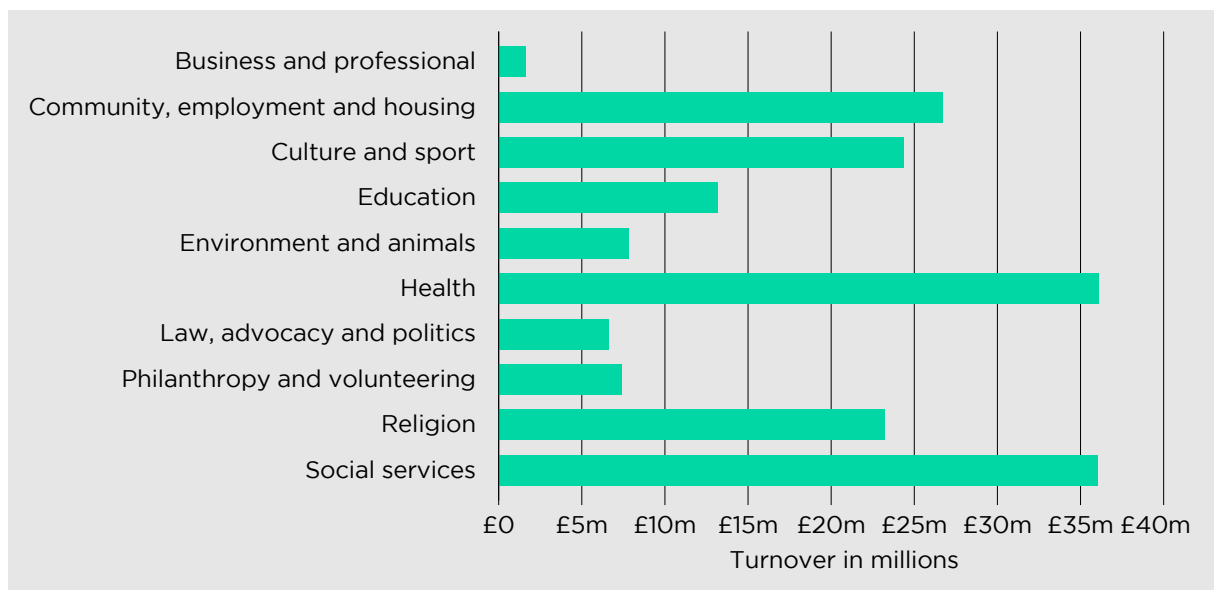
Voluntary and community sector

Turnover data is available for 658 voluntary and community sector organisations in Leicester in 2020/21. The combined turnover of these organisations was £184.5 million. This includes some schools, religious organisations, grant-making foundations and international aid organisations.¹⁹

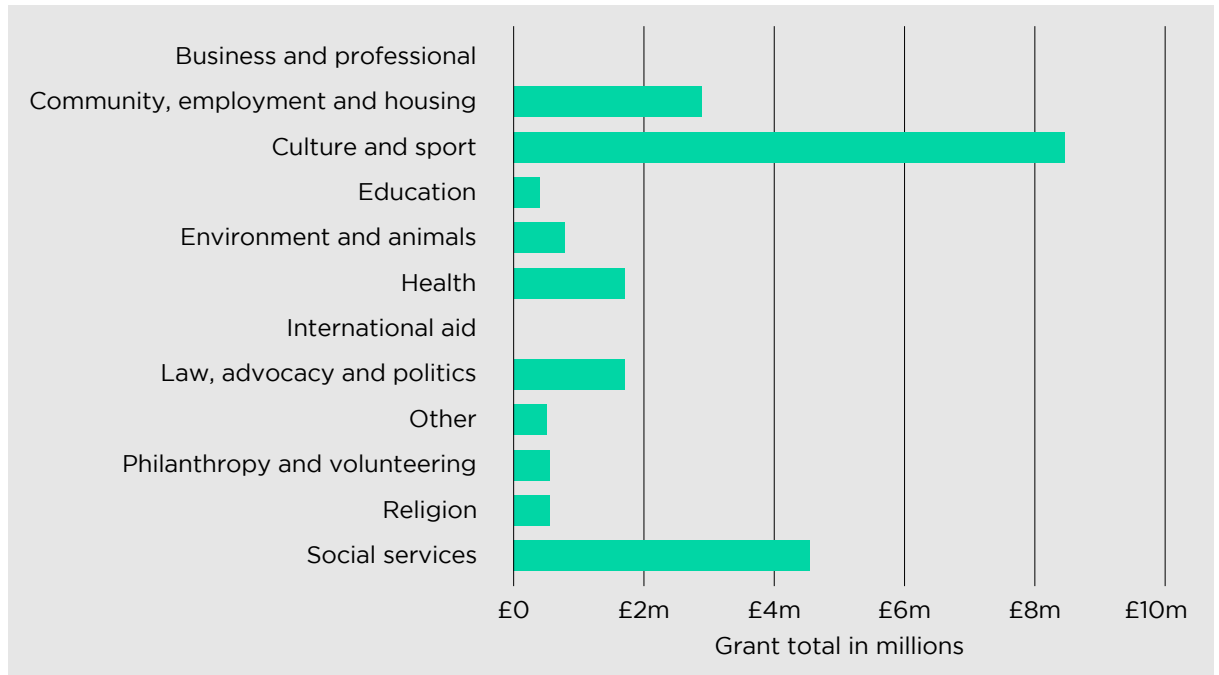
Small- to medium-sized organisations with a turnover between £5,000 and £5 million are most relevant to the programme, as these are the organisations that Empowering Places catalyst organisations are most likely to partner with or influence in their local area. Of the total number of organisations for which turnover data is available from 2020/21, 472 were in this category and had a combined turnover of £133.3 million, accounting for 72.2 per cent of the total £184.5 million turnover.²⁰

Profitability data for 606 non-profits in Leicester in the 2020/21 financial year demonstrates that 34 per cent of organisations experienced a loss. The following chart shows turnover by sector in 2020/21 – health, with 30 organisations, had the highest turnover at £36.3 million, followed closely by social services with 165 organisations and a turnover of £36.1 million.²¹

Turnover by sector in Leicester in 2020/21²²



Grant funding in Leicester by sector in 2020/21²³



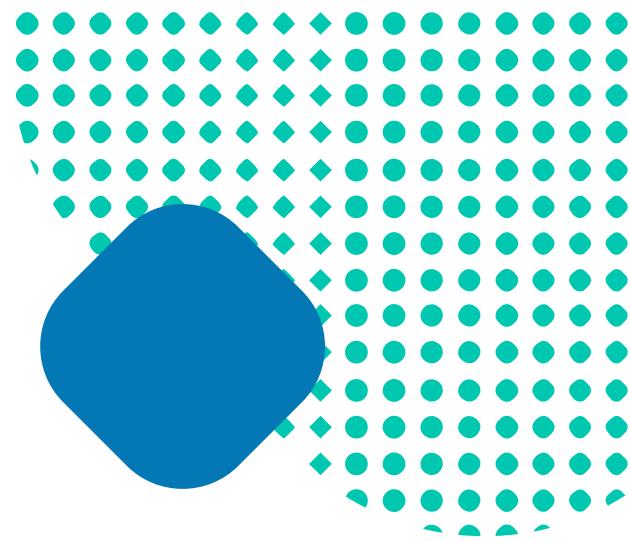
Funding landscape

In 2020/21, Leicester received a total of £21.7 million in grant funding, representing 0.4 per cent of national grant funding provided that year.

The above chart depicts grant funding in Leicester by sector in 2020/21, where culture and sport received the most.²⁴

The following table gives an overview of the funding landscape in Leicester, based on the available data.

Funding	Leicester25
Top five significant funders and amounts between 2017-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Lottery Community Fund (£30 million) The Wellcome Trust (£19.6 million) The National Lottery Heritage Fund (£8.5 million) Sport England (£6.2 million) BBC Children in Need (£3 million)



3.

EMPOWERING PLACES

CATALYST: B-INSPIRED

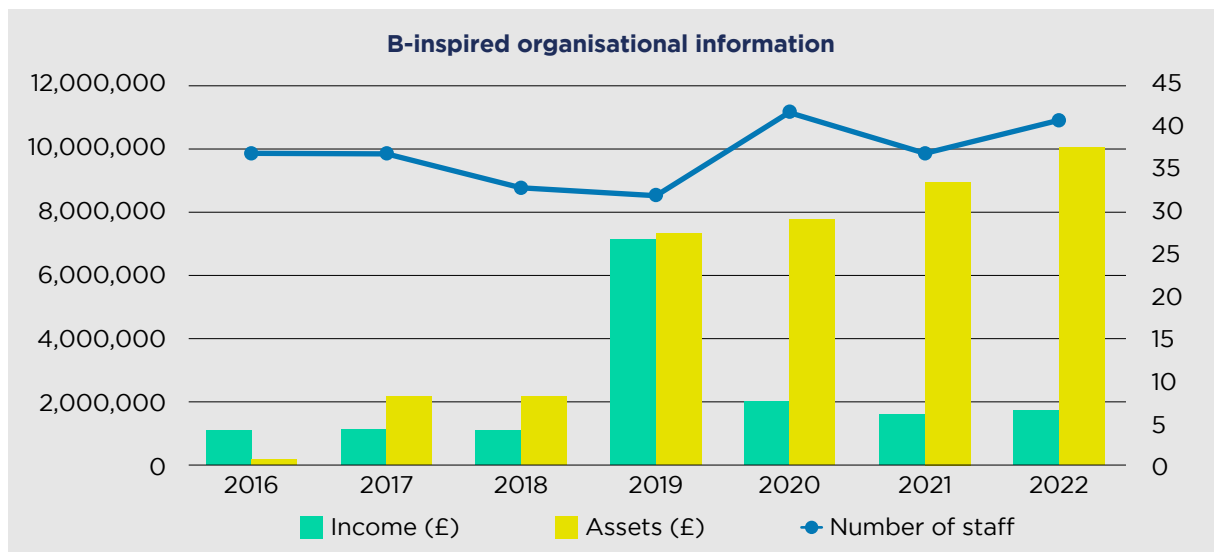


3.1 About the catalyst

B-inspired is a neighbourhood-based charity with a trading arm which owns several local assets as a legacy of the New Deal for Communities programme. The organisation uses revenue from renting out its assets to help fund its charitable activities, meaning that it has a long-term and sustainable revenue stream. It works with local people to understand local issues, forges relationships with service providers and has its own network of volunteers to support the local community.

In addition to the Power to Change Empowering Places programme, B-inspired also hosts sports and other physical activities, runs a food bank as part of the national FareShare scheme, has a befriending scheme for socially isolated older people in the community, delivers health services and runs a range of other community activities.

As of the 2022 year-end, B-inspired had a total income of £1.7 million.²⁶ The following chart shows B-inspired's self-reported total income, value of assets and staff head count between 2016 and 2022.²⁷ It's worth noting that the large spike in income in 2019 is due to B-inspired recording a transferred asset of the local health and social care centre as income for that year. It was subsequently reported as a capital asset in the organisation's accounts.



3.2 Empowering Places delivery

A legacy for the Empowering Places programme

In future years, B-inspired aims for Braunstone to boast a community business led economy, where local people will have created their own solutions to tackle some of the most difficult issues faced by their community. It aims for them to feel strong and supported by a partnership that has developed and built local infrastructure. B-inspired has an ambition to be working with and for local people, and for its partnership to be inclusive and embrace everyone who wants to help Braunstone flourish, from community groups to private business.

Approach to delivering Empowering Places

Aims of Empowering Places locally

B-inspired's approach to delivering Empowering Places has centred on developing a cluster of businesses around The Grove, a former council-run sports centre, with the aim of using community businesses to improve local learning and employment opportunities. B-inspired has a specific focus on health and reducing health inequalities, but also aims to have an impact on other areas including greater community pride and empowerment, and reduced social isolation.

B-inspired's aspiration for delivering the Empowering Places programme was to make Braunstone home to a thriving and integrated community business sector with the Braunstone Grove facility at its heart. It also aimed for the community businesses to offer a diverse range of employment, volunteering opportunities and new products and services not previously available to local residents.

These aspirations have largely been delivered. B-inspired has supported the development of five community businesses, four of which are housed in The Grove. Despite the challenges of pandemic restrictions, all five of the businesses are now independent of B-inspired and trading well. The businesses have brought the community much needed opportunities for children and young people in the form of the dance group and football club. The area now also has a bar which it was previously lacking and a thriving second-hand shop which sells clothes, toys and white goods to a community who would otherwise have to travel a considerable distance to find such things.

All the businesses have made a point of employing local residents as staff and volunteers as far as possible. The football club also runs an academy which provides training and employment opportunities, and the dance group offers training and coaching opportunities for young people.

The community businesses are generally working well together and looking for opportunities to support each other where they can, and The Grove has quickly become a focal point for the community with the potential for it to offer even more in the future.

Empowering Places within the catalyst organisation

B-inspired has always worked with local community groups and businesses but joining the Empowering Places programme has allowed it to focus specifically on community business, and playing the catalyst role neatly bridged the support that the organisation offers businesses with the range of social action work it delivers. Community business as a concept had historically not really taken off in the Braunstone area so Empowering Places has provided a good opportunity for B-inspired to push the idea locally:



It has provided a platform for us to really shout about community business to really motivate people that they can do it themselves; if they want to have a bar in the area, they can do it, if they want to have a cafe, they can do it ... There's lots of motivational traction really through this new role.

Delivery partner

Approach to delivering Empowering Places

The Empowering Places evaluation has identified three approaches that catalysts have taken to developing community businesses – incubation, community-led and individual entrepreneurialism. B-inspired has largely adopted an ‘incubation’ approach; setting up businesses based on what the community told them was needed and providing them with significant amounts of support to get them to a point where they are running autonomously. B-inspired chose to catalyse a relatively small number of community businesses, the majority of which are located in The Grove, the community hub that B-inspired took over from the local council and renovated.

The Grove is very much designed to be at the heart of the community and B-inspired has worked with the community businesses to ensure that, while each of them is an independent business, there is also the potential for them to support each other by offering complementary services (such as children’s parties that make use of the 4G football pitch and the café) and by providing peer support.

B-inspired staff described themselves as very enthusiastic about their catalyst role and felt that this resulted in them spending a considerable amount of time on the programme, to the point where it became more integrated into the organisation than had first been anticipated in the project plan. The staff at the dance group and football club both had limited business experience and this meant that, initially, quite intensive one-to-one and group support from B-inspired was needed during the set-up phase, with some contact taking place with the community businesses nearly every day.

In order to provide the support needed for two of the new businesses, the community shop and the community café, B-inspired appointed two new community development workers who were on short-term contracts to develop the businesses over their first year or so. Both development workers were put through a very comprehensive induction programme which introduced them to both the community and B-inspired's wide range of activities, reflecting the fact that B-inspired sees the new community businesses as being closely aligned with the rest of the organisation. The fact that the two development workers were appointed at the same time resulted in some real efficiencies, with both of them developing processes and procedures and planning marketing strategies for the new businesses together, and both have found the mutual support invaluable.



You can bounce off each other and learn different things off each other.

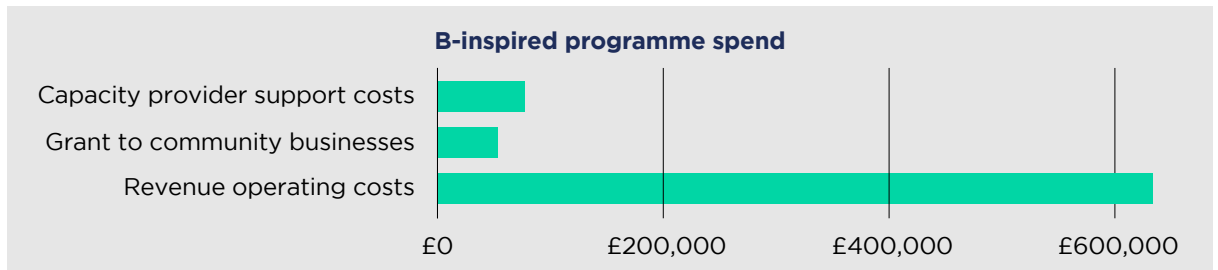
Community business staff

The community development worker for the second-hand shop has now been appointed by the board that runs the shop to manage it full time, meaning that the shop will benefit from the knowledge and connections that she has built up over the last couple of years. The community development worker for the café left at the end of the contract and the café is now fully in community hands.

As a catalyst, B-inspired also made considerable use of its strong connection with the local community to listen and understand the types of community business that were needed, where the gaps were and what would be used. There is every sign that this approach has paid off. The second-hand shop has a roaring trade and, after some teething issues with staffing and approach, the bar is making progress in establishing itself with the local community. The community also identified that the local area was lacking opportunities and activities for children and young people. B-inspired responded by supporting the dance group and football club to develop not only activities to involve local young people, but training and development opportunities too.

Relationships and influence

B-inspired has a wide network of both national and local organisations and evidence from the evaluation, including local stakeholder interviews, suggests that the organisation makes the most of the relationships to ensure that the organisation is well networked and central to local conversations. The organisation's chief executive sits on several local groups and is personally well known and respected both within Braunstone and across Leicester. Stakeholders we spoke to mentioned that B-inspired played a key role in local decision-making and that the organisation is well trusted locally.



3.3 Support and funding

The following chart provides a breakdown of B-inspired's spend across the programme.²⁸ Staff costs includes the cost of freelance support, and internal costs includes office rental, equipment, travel, subsistence, marketing, communications and events.

Impact of the capacity support

The B-inspired team is well established and, in many ways, needed minimal support from the programme as they already had a long history of community engagement and working to support local organisations. Because of changes in staffing at the organisations that supported the Empowering Places programme, B-inspired was allocated three different tech leads over the course of the programme. This meant that there was limited opportunity for them to establish a relationship and the B-inspired team didn't feel that element of the programme was as supportive as it could have been.

Although B-inspired initially made limited use of the support provided by the capacity support provider pool, which the team felt was quite generic, once they were able to add more local organisations to the list, they felt they were able to tailor the support to their needs and so used it more in the later years of the programme. This included bringing in CASE, a locally run cooperative which specialises in providing business support. The Leicester community businesses were given the opportunity to work with CASE to help them with the process of setting up and developing

their business plans. The community businesses spoke about this support as being hugely helpful in their development. B-inspired also sought support from local surveyors with taking on The Grove, as well as support with training, marketing and media support which the team found really helpful.

While the organisation has perhaps needed less support than other catalysts, the team still valued the peer support element of the programme and the opportunity to share experiences and ideas with the other places. This helped to confirm that the challenges they experience are widely shared, for example having lots of interest in volunteering but few people offering to lead. Sharing these experiences and ideas through learning camps and the other informal channels within the programme has provided support and inspiration.

“

Just the chance to share stories, to share ideas, to talk about what's working and literally people have picked up things and gone "Oh, I'm gonna give that a go" and so on.

Delivery partner

The team does not feel there are notable gaps in the support that they received through Empowering Places, since they already had many of the skills required to deliver the programme and support their community businesses. Having initially not drawn on the seed funding available for their community businesses, they distributed several seed grants in the later stages of the programme.

3.4 Impact of Empowering Places

Impact on B-inspired

Being a part of the Empowering Places programme has had some clear impacts on B-inspired as an organisation, both positive and more challenging.

1

Without being part of the programme, the team would not have applied to take on The Grove. The building had been offered to the team by the local authority two years previously, at a point when they did not have a clear plan for how they would use it. Empowering Places provided them with a clear focus and a viable plan for the building which centred on homing some of the community businesses, as well as expanding some of their existing activities such as office hire.

2

The programme provided B-inspired with more opportunities to develop partnerships and raise its profile. The catalyst's chief executive has always been well connected but participating in Empowering Places led to an increase in the invites she receives to speak at conferences and the opportunities to raise B-inspired's profile. At a local level, the programme has also widened the organisation's access to the local community. Working with the football club for example has given B-inspired contact with new families with different needs from those they supported previously, and the organisation's already strong community profile is growing too.

3

Participating in Empowering Places has helped B-inspired to bring in more income in grants and investments. The organisation estimates it has received £1.6 million in grants over the term of the programme that they might not otherwise have received.

4

The programme has provided B-inspired with an opportunity to diversify the roles of some of its staff, meaning Empowering Places has not only extended the organisation's capacity, but the skills and abilities of individual staff members too.

5

Stewardship of The Grove and setting up community businesses has allowed B-inspired to deliver additional services. For example, it now runs a holiday club for local children which is supported by some of the community businesses. B-inspired staff are now exploring the possibility of running alternative educational provision which is something they would not previously have been in a position to deliver.

6

B-inspired's approach to catalysing its community businesses was intensive, and the Empowering Places programme became well integrated into the organisation. While this had clear benefits, it also meant that the organisation had less resource to dedicate to other activities and Empowering Places has perhaps taken the organisation on a slightly different path from the one otherwise anticipated.

“

We've given a hell of a lot more resources and time than we thought we'd be giving.

Delivery partner

Had the organisation not become an Empowering Places catalyst, it is likely that it would have got involved in more project-based work on more specific themes like welfare and support.

Impact on the community and wider place

Community businesses supported by the catalyst

Community business name	Community business purpose
Pre-Loved @45	A place to buy second-hand clothes and bric-a-brac at affordable prices operating from the garage space they used to use for pop events and sales, with income re-invested in community events and services
FSD Football Club	A community focussed independent youth and adult education and sports community hub with a football academy helping young people, especially those from challenging backgrounds, to get ahead in life and maximise their potential, on and off the football pitch
ER Dance & Fitness	Community-funded volunteer run street dance and fitness group in Braunstone, helping children and young people from around Leicester to stay active and healthy
The Penalty Box Social Bar	A community run social bar located in The Grove to provide a social space for local residents to meet and hold events
Parkside Community Café	Community café located in the Grove serving lunches, hot drinks and light refreshments, providing support to local community – this has now closed
Braunstone Park 18 FC	Amateur football club
Takeover Radio UK	Community radio station, run by young people for young people

Impact of Empowering Places on individuals, community business and the wider community

While it is still early days for some of Braunstone's community businesses, some emerging impacts have already been identified by the catalyst and community business staff. These fall into three broad categories: impacts on individuals, on the community businesses themselves and those on the wider community.

Individuals involved with the developing community businesses have experienced very real impacts as a result of the programme. The dance group, for example, existed for many years before being formally supported by B-inspired with the lead staff member running it

alongside their paid job. When she was made redundant, B-inspired introduced her to the support available through the Empowering Places programme to help her formally establish a community business. This included extensive training on all the considerations, practicalities and skills involved. For her, the support and training has been 'brilliant' and like a 'bright light' at the time that she needed it. There is growing evidence that volunteers with community businesses are also really benefitting. Those interviewed during our ethnography work explained how becoming involved with a community business has helped them to feel more connected and embedded within their community.

“

I feel it, I feel a lot more empowered in the community. I feel like I have more of a voice. I feel like I know a lot more people than I initially knew. I think it's been a great opportunity for me.

Video ethnography participant

In some instances, volunteering with a community business has given individuals the skills and confidence they needed to get back into work. They may have started as a volunteer before moving to a paid role either within the community business, or elsewhere.

“

It gave me the confidence to get back into work and then go in from a volunteer to paid hours and now I have, you know, a secure job, so to speak, what's local and I'm giving back.

Video ethnography participant

The community businesses themselves have also enjoyed considerable benefits from the programme. The dance group and football club, both of which existed in some form before Empowering Places, would arguably not be fully-fledged community businesses without the training and support the programme provided. B-inspired has held these businesses' hands at every stage, ensuring they had the training they needed to establish and run a community business as well as support with marketing, social media, web design and writing funding bids. The groups may have continued in an informal way without this support, but their role within the community would have been less cemented and their potential for sustainability much reduced.

“

So, the impact is real, you know we've got groups there that have been through business start-up training programmes for free that they would not have had access to, a level of mentorship that they would not have had access to.

Delivery partner

Just before the programme finished, B-inspired drew down a final seed grant to help an otherwise struggling charity reform as a community business and move into The Grove. Instead of closing, Takeover Radio UK (a community radio station run by young people for young people) is now flourishing in its new home.

The approach that B-inspired has taken by hosting the majority of the community businesses within one central hub has also had a beneficial impact on the community businesses as they are able to engage and train alongside each other, and provide peer support.

Wider benefits to the community are also becoming evident. The redevelopment of The Grove, and the community businesses that operate from it, are providing the local community with a hub and services that were previously lacking. There is now a focal point for the community, somewhere for people to visit and gather, and B-inspired staff described how it has very quickly entered (particularly young) people's consciousness. Community business staff felt similarly, that The Grove is connecting the community in new ways.

“

We have a better beat in the community, we have a home ... for everybody, regardless you know, it doesn't matter whether you're two in a family or ten in a family, you're all welcome there. It's an amazing building and that opportunity just would not have happened without Empowering Places.

Community business staff

It is relatively early in the life of the community businesses, and B-inspired is the only organisation currently championing community businesses locally. Staff have, however, indicated that what they're doing is being noticed by stakeholders and residents beyond Braunstone. With the increased national impetus behind the social economy, there is the potential for the work in Braunstone to have a ripple effect on other parts of the local community.

3.5 The COVID-19 pandemic

Impact of Covid on the catalyst's delivery of Empowering Places

As Empowering Places was rolled out against the backdrop of the pandemic, it's important to acknowledge the considerable impact it had on B-inspired and its ability to deliver the programme. B-inspired was hugely affected as an organisation. The Grove had only just opened its doors for the first time when the first lockdown was implemented in March 2020 and B-inspired lost valuable trading income, as well as the opportunity to generate new income streams by further developing the hub. B-inspired still had to meet The Grove's considerable overheads while the building was closed and staff understandably felt like it had been 'leaking money'. The Business Box, B-inspired's other trading business that provided serviced office space at commercial rates to fund its charitable activities, was also badly hit as many tenants could not afford rent or had to close their contracts.

While the pandemic did not alter B-inspired's fundamental approach to delivering Empowering Places, it inevitably had an impact on its capacity to deliver its catalysing activity. Alongside a considerably reduced income, the organisation experienced a surge in demand for its social support, including a 37 per cent increase in demand for the food bank. At some points, and as staff needed to be reallocated to meet these pressing demands, there was inevitably less resource available for Empowering Places.

The nature of the support it provided community businesses also changed. When both the football club and dance group lost income streams when the pandemic struck, B-inspired turned its attention to applying for grants to support them.

Impact on community businesses

Braunstone's community businesses were inevitably also hugely affected by the pandemic. The football club and dance group were both operating from The Grove when it closed for much of 2020. Both had been about to establish themselves as independent businesses, and were enjoying strong bookings on the back of the successful recent launch of The Grove, and both immediately lost income. Although the dance group moved its classes online, it was unsustainable to charge for them when families were struggling and there were many online classes freely available, often hosted by celebrities. They ran free online sessions to maintain presence and interest throughout the initial lockdown, but this ultimately cost more to provide as online classes took longer to prepare and required new hardware to deliver. Coaches' fees came out of the group's reserves and some small grants they were able to access. As they were not yet operating as a community business, funding routes were limited and finances were a persistent concern, particularly as the group was the main source of income for many.

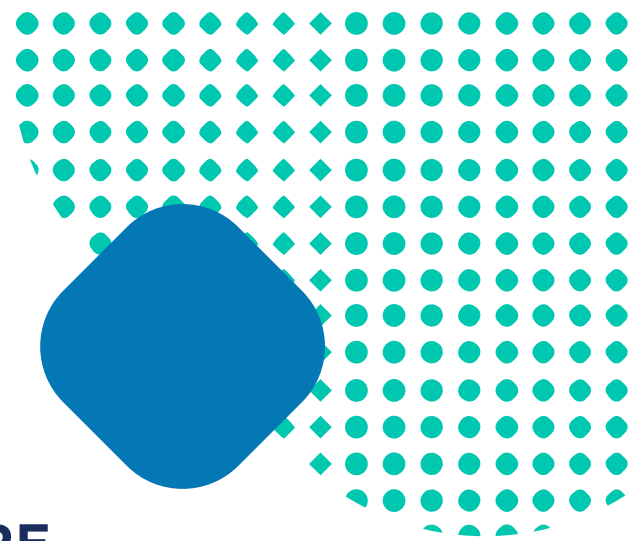
While challenging, the group managed to identify several positives from the experience, not least that moving online helped them reach a different audience, and made them think creatively about how to engage audiences with social media.

“I've shocked myself with how creative I could be.

Community business staff

The football club was also hugely affected, not least because three of the teams that played on the pitch became frustrated with the local ban on grassroots sports in Leicester, and moved to play elsewhere. B-inspired also had to work hard to find a replacement for the football club leader who stepped down during the pandemic.

While the bar, café and shop were not operating when restrictions were introduced, and what momentum and local volunteer interest that had been built was lost, the new development workers really helped get things back on track by leading the set-up of the bar and café when circumstances allowed.



4. **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

4.1 Ways of working

The future looks positive for B-inspired and some of the community businesses it has been supporting, as the catalyst goes from strength to strength. It delivered a holiday club scheme in 2021 and 2022, offering funded and low-cost places to ensure that the scheme was accessible to local families. The team is now exploring a range of new community support including family learning, after-school activities and even alternative educational provision. B-inspired always aimed to let some of The Grove as office space and currently has two full-time tenants renting three offices between them. B-inspired aims to invest more of its charity funds in The Grove over the next few years, to continue its development and make the space more attractive to hire.

4.2 Sustainability

With the programme ending, B-inspired has stopped all formal support for community businesses, transitioning from catalyst to business landlord – crucial to ensure it remains sustainable. As they all had to close or delay their start-up during the pandemic, none of the community businesses are as mature as had been planned, which has been particularly challenging for B-inspired. The café sadly ceased trading in Spring 2023, due to irreconcilable differences between its directors and, while a loss for the local community, it also highlights the risks inherent in being a landlord to fledgling businesses. Tenants will always be required to safeguard The Grove's income.

The bar is less developed than hoped, has struggled with staffing issues and getting its offer right, but there is evident appetite for its services. Resolving staffing issues and capitalising on the opportunities the community provides will give it a chance of surviving the key early years of trading to become sustainable in the longer term.

The community shop, football club and dance group are all currently in a strong position. Numbers are steadily growing for activity, and the shop is thriving as local residents take advantage of low prices during the cost-of-living crisis. The shop has found new ways of reaching the community with pop-up shops around the city. The dance group's director will be retiring in the next few years and B-inspired is working on succession planning with the team.

While B-inspired's formal support ends, the team will continue to find ways of supporting the businesses where it can, involving them in holiday programmes and helping grow local networks and relationships. They are also helping a local Co-op food store with plans to create a community space and café in its refurbished premises, drawing on its experience and a small seed grant for start-up training when the time comes.

B-inspired also has three new commercial tenants, a youth charity and a holistic therapist at The Grove.

ENDNOTES



- 1 Power to Change describes itself as: 'the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test, and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.'
- 2 Informed by the 2015 English indices of deprivation (the most recent data available at the time). Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>
- 3 Marsh Farm Futures in Luton was the seventh member of the Empowering Places cohort; its involvement with the programme ended in August 2019, shortly after Renaisi joined as evaluators.
- 4 Originally incubated by Action for Business Ltd in Carlisle Business Centre, Manningham.
- 5 An earlier version of this profile (2021) focused on qualitative and quantitative data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 6 The community café sadly closed in early 2023 due to personal challenges.
- 7 English Indices of Deprivation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation>
- 8 Local Insight: <https://ocsi.uk/local-insight/>
- 9 Thriving Places Index: <https://www.thrivingplacesindex.org/>
- 10 Place Analytics: <https://gt-placeanalytics.co.uk/>
- 11 UK Social Fabric Index: <https://www.ukonward.com/data/social-fabric-index/>
- 12 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2022.
- 13 Hyperlocal booster version of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Community Life Survey (2019).
- 14 Thriving Places Index (2020).
- 15 Place Analytics, local authority-wide (2019).
- 16 UK Social Fabric Index (2020).

- 17 Hyperlocal booster version of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Community Life Survey (2021).
- 18 *ibid.*
- 19 MyCake analysis of Companies House and Charity Commission Data, Office for National Statistics (April 2022).
- 20 *ibid.*
- 21 *ibid.*
- 22 *ibid.*
- 23 *ibid.*
- 24 *ibid.*
- 25 July 2023 data from 360Giving, a charity that helps organisations to publish open, standardised grants data. For more information, see: [GrantNav](#). This data excludes statutory funding from central government.
- 26 Empowering Places 2022 survey.
- 27 Power to Change annual grantee survey (2016–2022). The data presented here is self-reported by the catalyst organisation to Power to Change.
- 28 Power to Change internal report (December 2022).



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