



Social Climbers:

*SUPPORTING THE THIRD SECTOR
TO MAKE BREAKTHROUGHS*

Fuse: embedding new ways of working and encouraging leaps in progress.





‘Never more needed, never been harder’

We know that the Liverpool City Region is full of incredible, socially minded organisations and individuals who want to create a real impact for local people. We also know that these organisations and individuals are navigating a complex world. Rising public sector resource pressures, increased demand for services and support, worsening health inequalities and declining mental health are all contributing to an accelerating need for innovative, community-led solutions.

Within this context, we’re on a mission to support local, socially trading organisations to expand their reach and impact. We’ve been working to support ambitious leaders and doers across the Liverpool City Region to think about growth.

That’s where Social Climbers comes in. Throughout 2024 we worked on developing and delivering a bespoke programme of social enterprise support - to make ‘breakthroughs’ in some of the region’s most promising social enterprises and charities - the ones making big impact on the world of public services. We’ve been working in partnership on this programme with other key players who support organisations locally, including Kindred and the School for Social Entrepreneurs, enabled by funding from Postcode Innovation Trust and UKSPF.

This support was focused on 3 priority areas, based on local need:

- 1. Mental health** - 1 in 5 children and young people struggle with their mental health. In more deprived areas like Liverpool this is likely to be higher.
- 2. Health inequalities** - on average, people living in the poorest areas of the UK live 15 years less than those in affluent areas.
- 3. Accessing health and social care** - almost half a million adults across England waiting for assessments, care or payments to start.



Through Social Climbers, during 2024 we had the opportunity to provide deep support for 12 local charities and social enterprises that achieve brilliant outcomes for people and communities across the Liverpool City Region, as well as providing opportunities for many more to come together through our events and learning communities.

Social Climbers in numbers

£180k in funding secured to deliver Social Climbers support work*

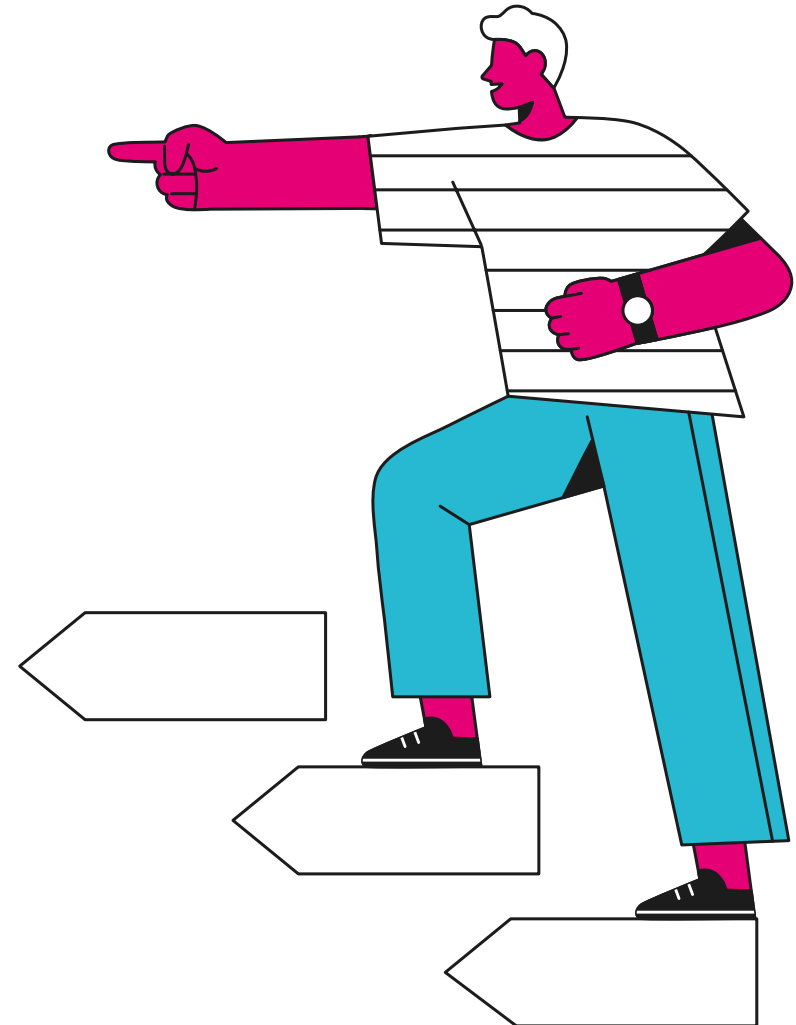
12 incredible organisations supported

1,300 hours spent delivering support

21 organisations in our learning community

£150k secured in social investment

**Matched with client investment to ensure the greatest impact of the funding.*



Spotlight on our support

Throughout 2024, Social Climbers enabled us to work with a variety of organisations. These organisations are diverse in focus and have impact across a range of areas. We worked with adult social care providers, sporting charities, community wellbeing organisations and even a museum.

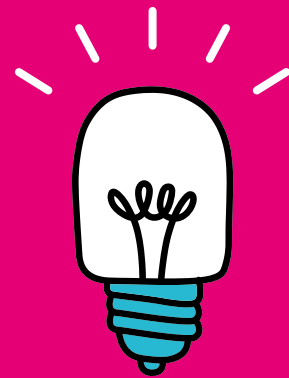
Some of these organisations are well-established, with decades of experience providing support to hundreds of people. Others are smaller and still early on in their journey. But, despite these differences, they all have one big thing in common - their drive to make a bigger and bolder difference to the communities they serve.

We've helped these organisations to get moving, growing their ideas, navigating opportunities and building solid ground for them to make breakthroughs.

While, by nature, these projects were shorter than what we'd usually deliver (ranging from a day to a few months) we've been able to bring objectivity and clarity, insight and expertise, helping leaders to focus on the areas where they can have the biggest impact.

We didn't box things up - the support we provided was bespoke and we adapted our advice and guidance to a range of areas, specific to each organisation's individual needs. We delivered workshops, undertook feasibility studies, developed commercial plans and drafted marketing and engagement strategies. We created Theories of Change, engaged stakeholders and coached leaders. No one project was the same.





**While lots of this work is in its early stages
and it's a bit too early to share the details,
we want to give you an idea of some of
the things we've been up to...**



Putting the ‘Local’ in Local Solutions

Back in May 2024, Local Solutions asked us for our help to test out the feasibility of a new idea to transform the way they deliver their services.

The team wanted our support to explore the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities attached to the development of a series of high street community hubs, places where local people can access their services with homelessness accommodation attached.

This idea intended to tackle a number of interconnected issues including the need for community partnership spaces, place-based coordination and suitable accommodation for young people using their homelessness services.

Over a number of months, we worked with the Local Solutions team to work through their uncertainty, pinning down what this model of delivery would look like, then exploring different ways of making this a reality.

[Read more](#)

Supporting TLC to transform lives

For Capacity, one of the big benefits of Social Climbers has been the opportunity to work with new organisations and reach new communities. Transform Lives Company (TLC) is one of these organisations.


Capacity and Transform Lives have a lot in common. We're both keen to create fundamental change in our public services, helping everyone to understand the roles they play in making change happen and embedding new ways of working.

Throughout 2024, we worked with TLC to think through how we can transform the way local employment support is delivered, by helping them to develop a more sustainable business model that is underpinned by long-term funding and partnership working.

We spent time working with the TLC team to build a roadmap for change, getting to grips with what local people want and need from employment support.

[Read more](#)





“The Social Climbers programme has been a huge support to Open Door over the last year, helping us manage our growth and transition as an organisation, building the right systems internally, and providing invaluable mentorship and feedback for our senior team.”

George Hawkins, Project Director, Open Door

Getting honest about growth:

BUILDING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

While our Social Climbers programme enabled us to deliver targeted support to some incredible organisations, relationships and connections are at the heart of what we do. So, we were eager to bring together like-minded organisations and people with a strong social purpose. With this in mind, back in mid-2024 we established our Social Climbers Learning Community.

Delivered through a series of monthly, online sessions, our Learning Community was an opportunity for leaders and doers from across the Liverpool City Region and Cheshire to come together, share their experiences and talk about all things growth.

“It’s a given me a drive to stick with my vision of expansion and growth... It’s a safe space where I can be honest and get support from like-minded people.”

From the Steve Morgan Foundation to Liverpool John Moore’s University to Koala North West, our Learning Community sessions featured some brilliant guests from local organisations making a difference.

“It’s valuable to celebrate the bravery of those who shared their experiences of when things haven’t gone right. It gives you confidence as a leader that you don’t have to be perfect.”

Reflecting on successes, failures and learning, these organisations provided open and honest reflections on their experiences of growth - the good, the bad and the ugly.

We’ve heard some brilliant feedback from those who attended our sessions about the value of having a safe space where people can be honest about their experiences and get support from others going through the same thing.



Throughout the year, we delivered five sessions bringing together 21 third sector organisations and social businesses.

What we've learned

This year, we've done a lot of thinking about the value we bring to our partners and learned a lot about the challenges local, socially trading organisations are experiencing.

Here are our key reflections:



Busy leaders value the headspace we're creating.

We know that the organisations we work with are led by people who are committed to bringing about real change for the people they serve. But, at the same time, these people are finding it hard to focus on long-term growth against a backdrop of increasing demand.

Across the projects we've worked on through Social Climbers, there's one thing we're hearing loud and clear. The leaders and doers we're supporting value the opportunity to step away from the day to day, the chance to carve out some space to think about long-term ambitions. We're keen to continue to create this space for even more leaders across the Liverpool City Region.



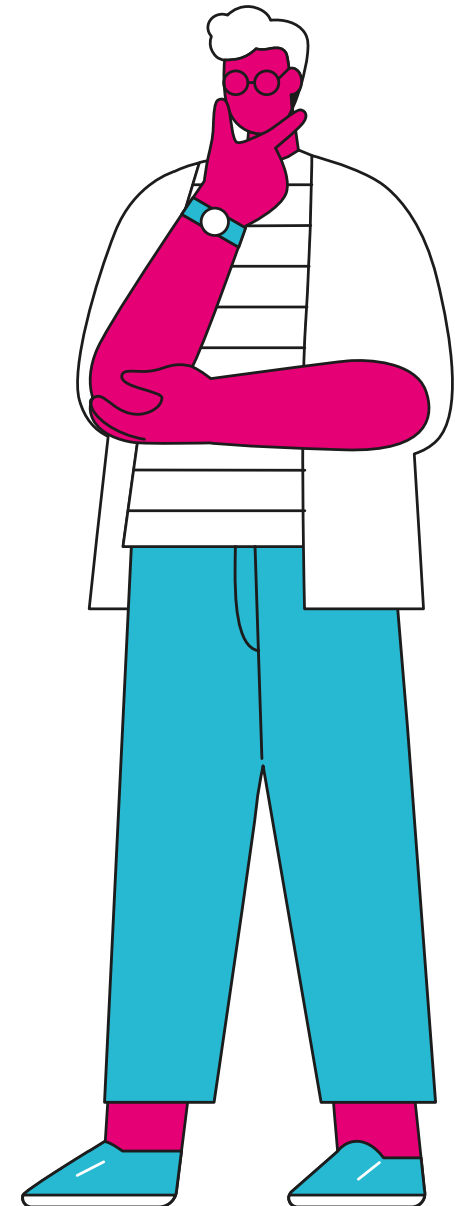


Don't underestimate the power of getting a small group of people in a room. A lot of our Social Climbers projects have had tighter timescales than we're used to and we've learned that we're great at working at pace and getting to a final output quickly. One of the ways we've managed to deliver impactful work while grappling with a tight deadline is by bringing a core group of people together - whether that's internally or externally - to unpick a knotty issue. We've realised that there's real value in getting a couple of hours in the calendar for some collective thinking and reflecting.



It's tough out there. Like we said, our third-sector partners are navigating a complex landscape of funding scarcity and growing demand, alongside other pressing challenges. While these organisations are keen to do things differently and deepen their impact, external barriers are making this increasingly difficult. The recent announcement of rising national insurance contributions is a significant barrier for the organisations we're supporting, hindering the progress of their growth plans. Increased employment costs are eating into already tight budgets.

This will result in less money for innovation, expansion and investment in new projects. This is difficult to see, and we know it limits the potential reach and impact of the organisations we support.



So, what's next?

Here at Capacity, we've loved having the chance to work with some incredible organisations driven by a strong social purpose. We're looking forward to driving this forward in 2025.

Here's a sneak peek at our plans:




Reaching more organisations

We'll continue to deliver Social Climbers throughout 2025, delivering bespoke support to even more organisations. We're already working on our pipeline and identifying some of the most promising local social enterprises we'd love to work with!




Convening and connecting

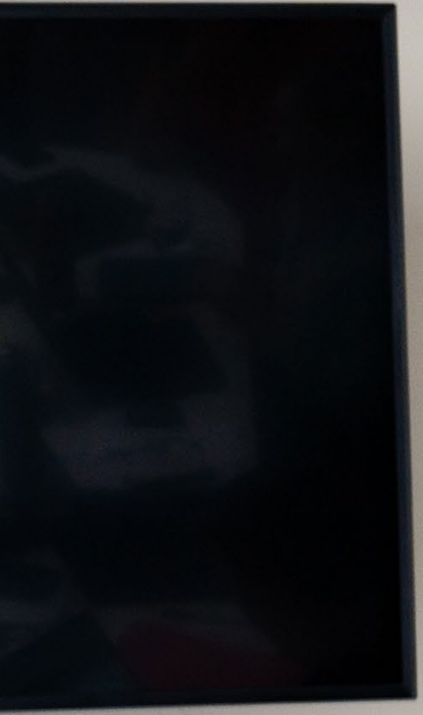
We know that Capacity has a vital role to play in building a network and connecting like-minded people and organisations. Throughout 2025, we'd like to harness our power as convenors and connectors, building more space and time for leaders to share their experiences and strengthen their practice. This will link in with our Capacity Fundamentals work.



“Working with Capacity on this project, and the final report they produced has really helped the Local Solutions team to refine our thinking, capturing exactly what we we’re looking for, despite a shifting brief. We’re particularly grateful for Capacity’s ability to work with the fact that we weren’t quite sure what the focus should be at the outset.”



Tom Harrison, CEO, Local Solutions



Approach

Background

- Specific work - success/failure.
- Best practice examples (e.g. intentionally).
- System strengths - Asset mapping.
- Links into economic development - e.g. jobs.
- Stakeholders \Rightarrow mapping.

Impact/Resilience

- night
- spend
- work hours
- Absenteeism

Business



