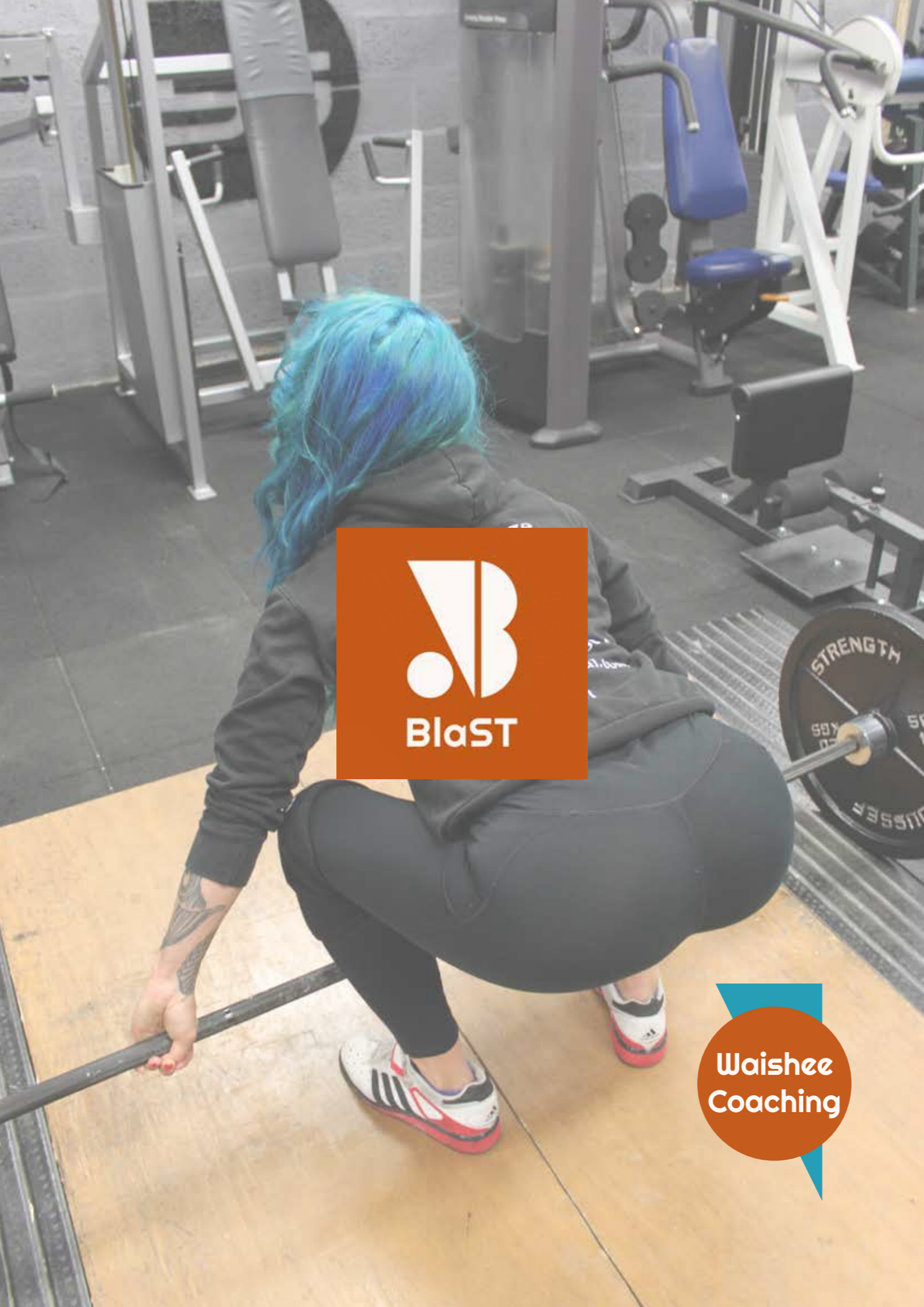


An evaluation of the BlaST network project

2021





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Baytree
Catering



01. Executive summary

BlaST, established in 2020, is a collaborating community of 50+ business leaders with Black lived experience in the Liverpool City Region. It includes Black and Brown people, People of Colour and inward migrating peoples – who trade commercially and deliver social benefit. For the purpose of clarity, we will use the term ‘Black’ from this point. BlaST promotes the work and communicates the positive social or environmental impact that BlaST-led businesses have on our communities and the contribution we make to the city region’s economy.

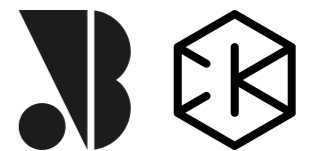
BlaST is supported by, but independent of Kindred (see: What is Kindred, page 13-15), which provides support and money to grow the social impact of socially-trading organisations (STOs) across the region. Socially-trading organisations are businesses that deliver social benefits AND trade commercially – businesses with a social mission. (See more about STOs on page 27).

This evaluation tells the story of the BlaST journey and it is told by us – its members – reflecting our progress and identifying the actions required to grow our social impact. The evaluation will be used to influence the support Kindred provides for BlaST over the coming year and as a basis for wider discussions with other social investment and support opportunities.

The findings and recommendations which we share come directly out of the peer-to-peer conversations that BlaST network members facilitated and took part in – reflecting a range of key issues that BlaST has been set up to address. We think they are important findings and they are very much action-focused. We believe they make an important and significant contribution to the vital conversation that must continue to create the

changes needed to support and enable the LCR Black-led socially-trading sector to grow and flourish. In turn, BlaST members will contribute to community wealth and the growing economic independence and resilience of LCR’s Black and minority communities.

Between January and March 2021, 23 Black-led socially-trading organisations were brought together by Joanne Anderson – now Mayor of Liverpool – to form BlaST. They comprised four larger and well-established organisations, eight small organisations and 11 sole traders who, between them, have a collective turnover of £1,790,386 and employ around 100 people. Their activities span four industry sectors, although most organisations are involved across multiple sectors. In March 2021 each founding BlaST member received a micro award to grow its social impact.



This evaluation, led by BlaST members supported by the Kindred team, is based on the impact of those original awards, a survey of recipients and more in-depth conversations with a sample of BlaST members.

02.

Findings and recommendations

BlaST operates as a collaborating community, which enables both sole traders and micro-businesses to overcome the limitations of their small size through mutual support and collaboration. STOs that are part of a collaborating community are found to perform better than those working in isolation.

- We recommend that BlaST is supported to grow as a collaborating community, equipping its membership with the skills to cooperate, share ideas and foster a culture in which mutual benefit is understood and practised.

BlaST provides a collective voice, valued by its members, that is providing ways for the Black business community to come together, understand our own collective value and express our ambitions for growth and social impact.

- We recommend that BlaST members are equipped with our collective social and economic value, reflecting the total collective value that the network brings to the region financially, and the value added in terms of impact.

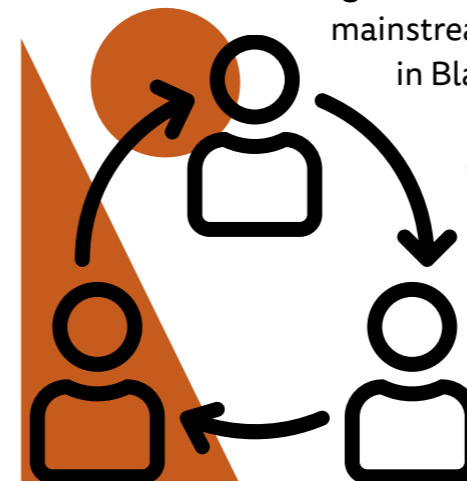
We should be supported to individually assess our viability and make growth plans, with clear steps to move organisations out of short-term survival mode into sustainability and growth.



Set up mid-lockdown, BlaST membership has, to date, relied solely on word-of-mouth networks and happenstance. Few outside the membership know of its existence or the range of services and products offered by members.

- We recommend a campaign to showcase BlaST members and extend membership is developed, once BlaST's purpose and plans for the next 12 months are agreed upon.

Opportunities for collaboration, including the Routes and Roots Festival 2021, have also emerged within industry sectors and across sectors that have resulted in mutual benefit and business growth. However, it is the tangible and measurable benefits to members, including new contracts, access to new resources and the customisation of mainstream services to meet shared needs, that have built confidence in BlaST's ability to make a real difference.



- We recommend peer-to-peer support is continued with a mechanism to facilitate asks and offers.
- We recommend opportunities are identified for BlaST members to collaborate for mutual benefit.
- We recommend opportunities are shared between a BlaST mailing list and the tangible and measurable gains are quantified in order to monitor BlaST's value and further influence mainstream delivery.

However, members agree, BlaST now requires a clear vision and leadership to quantify and promote BlaST's collective social and economic value – to itself, its stakeholders, mainstream providers and growth customers. With this vision in place, BlaST members see the value of continued in-person meetings and publication and celebration of their collective contributions, so that we in BlaST know our collective, and are equipped to promote each other.

- We recommend a publication and in-person event be used to clarify BlaST's ambition and vision so that an action plan with clear aims and tangible outcomes can be developed and delivered with supporting partners and the growth of our impact is measured.

Existing BlaST members have innovative growth ambitions and are using our lived experience to radically re-design services from the bottom up. Growth plans are similar to those of any sector or business group and include:

- growing customer bases
- knowledge of employee numbers
- winning new contracts
- additional or more sustainable funding
- innovation including digitisation
- social franchising

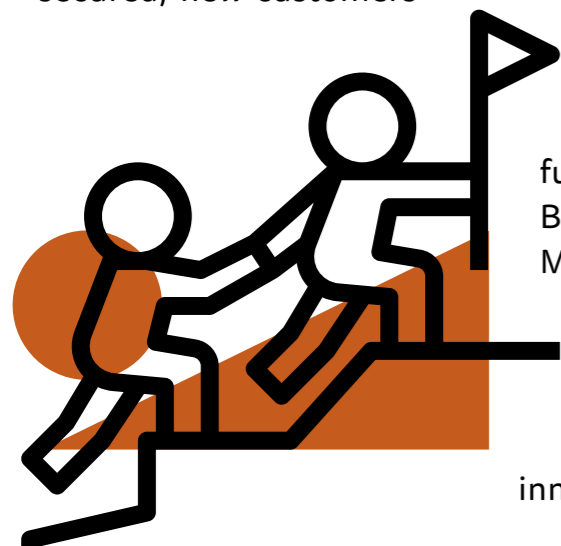
However, most of us aspiring to grow don't have a growth plan – or know what steps we would take to achieve that growth.

- **We recommend BlaST members are supported to develop growth plans.**

To achieve growth, BlaST members have some shared requirements common within collaborating communities including administration support, financial management and planning, tendering and marketing. Access to shared services allows for the business to access capacity and expertise without having to employ a full range of staff the business can't afford as it grows.

- **We recommend BlaST is introduced to those STOs already offering or currently developing shared services and their requirements are matched.**

Members are clear that BlaST's success should be measured by the growth of its member organisations in terms of our individual and collective turnover; the additional contracts secured; new customers and levered funding and investment.



Members suggested some of this growth could be delivered by a campaign that persuades grant funders and commissioners (who typically contract BlaST organisations once a year, in Black History Month, for example), to move from seasonal to year-round/ongoing and sustainable contracts. Some saw opportunities for joint and coordinated bids within specific sectors that reflect members' strengths, address community needs and/or innovate system change.

The members who have led BlaST since the departure of the founder, agreed BlaST would not achieve its potential without some coordination and leadership. An

online and physical focus or hub for BlaST's work would be beneficial.

Since this evaluation was carried out, a BlaST coordinator has been appointed as a member of the Kindred team and BlaST is hosted on the Kindred website. Partners at Kuumba Imani are exploring the potential for a Black Business Hub.

- **BlaST's success should be measured by the growth of its member organisations in terms of our individual and collective turnover; the additional contracts secured; new customers and levered funding and investment. We recommend BlaST measures success by the growth of our member organisations requiring a baseline and growth targets.**
- **We recommend BlaST leads a campaign to move contractors from occasional and time-limited commissions to all-year and multi-year contracts.**
- **We recommend BlaST identifies and coordinates opportunities for joint bids and commissioning and builds relations with funders and commissioners on behalf of our members.**



BlaST's experience of the social enterprise sector within the region appears to reflect national evidence that knowledge of the sector and access to the support and opportunities on offer is low or non-existent. 30% of members relied partially or wholly on a single council for grant funding. This lack of knowledge is likely to hamper a transition from grant reliance to independent trading that is evident in the wider Kindred STO community.

However, BlaST membership also includes private businesses that deliver social benefit as a matter of course. It may be that STOs are more prevalent within the region's Black-led businesses than a simple analysis of company structures would imply. This understanding of commercial businesses, whose primary objectives are to serve the community they are a part of, may offer a preferable economic model. An economy in which private and community benefit are understood as inextricably integrated is more likely to be self-moderating, community wealth is better shared, and could be celebrated and expanded by BlaST.



It is notable that, of the original BlaST membership, only one organisation owns a building. Social enterprises that own an asset are found to be more resilient and sustainable.

Similarly, only one organisation had had any form of investment, with the majority dependent on a combination of time-limited project grants, local contracts and commissions, and reliance on a customer base with very little disposable income. National research shows that 13% of social enterprises are led by people of colour – yet only 2.6% of social investment goes to those organisations led by us. Any business growth without investment is likely to be slow and limited and this, in turn, limits the wealth and opportunities available to the communities we are a part of.



- We recommend Kindred maintains a target of 25% of its investment going to BlaST members and continues to engage other investors in BlaST's ambitions.
- We recommend a baseline of asset ownership amongst BlaST members be established.

Although the BlaST network envisages eventual autonomy, it has requested it develops under the Kindred umbrella at the outset – just as Kindred, at its outset, was incubated by Power to Change.

- We recommend Kindred continues to incubate BlaST as a collaborating community.



03. Introduction

Members of the BlaST network have led this evaluation and conversation with both the BlaST network and the wider community, influencers and stakeholders with support from the Kindred team. We identify some of the barriers to increasing the scale, number and social impact of BlaST-led businesses and make recommendations on how to reduce or remove them.

Grow
Wellbeing

04.

What is BlaST?

BlaST is designed to recognise the impact and contribution of socially-trading organisations (STOs), led by those with Black lived experience and expertise. BlaST is inclusive of STOs led by Black and Brown people, People Of Colour, and inward migrating peoples who are leading and forming STOs across the Liverpool City Region.

The growing network of 50+ business leaders promotes the work and communicates the positive social or environmental impact that BlaST-led businesses have on our local communities, and the contribution we make to the city region's economy.

The network developed out of a piece of work, called Black Social Traders, which raised

the profile of socially-trading organisations from Black and diverse ethnic backgrounds in the Liverpool City Region.

BlaST was conceived by Joanne Anderson – a founder member of social investment CIC, Kindred and a Black woman. Part of its mission is to increase social impact and help accelerate change to address inequalities. And as a direct result of the establishment of BlaST, 25% of STO investment from Kindred so far has been offered to STOs led by entrepreneurs from Black and other diverse ethnic backgrounds.

BlaST is supported by, but independent of Kindred, which provides support and money to grow the social impact of socially-trading organisations

across LCR. Kindred's support of BlaST recognises the critical value of lived experience in the delivery of social impact and system change.

05.

What is Kindred?

Kindred connects, supports and harnesses local entrepreneurialism for social good.

Kindred is a community interest company (CIC), owned locally and collectively, that re-invests money, space and learning in Liverpool City Region's socially-trading economy.

Kindred's ambition for our city region is to create an economy that is kinder and fairer for us all. Kindred's aim is to grow the impact of businesses that trade socially. Kindred offers hands-on, peer-to-peer support and learning, tailored to grow both individual and collective social impact.



Kindred has two key functions:

1. Membership

A collaborative, peer-to-peer support network to develop and grow our collective impact, across LCR

2. Money

We support the region's STOs with money to help them grow and multiply their impact



What's different about Kindred?

- Kindred is owned by its community, for the benefit of its community... forever.
- It's been developed by and with over 150 socially-trading businesses across LCR
- It has received money from LCR Combined Authority and Power to Change – but is independent of them
- It's designed to offer new kinds of money and support, not currently available in the region
- The money Kindred invests will be used time and time again, as the businesses we invest in 'pay it forward'
- Our collective value will be measured by our social impacts – not just our financial returns
- Any money is loaned at 0% interest. STOs may also have the option to repay money partly in social value, meaning that money could be repaid by demonstrating the social impact you create. Each arrangement is specific to the needs of the STO.

For more information about Kindred, the research that led to its establishment and how it is run go to www.kindred-lcr.co.uk. You can also find the full evaluation of Kindred's pilot phase there.

Kindred's priorities are the result of consultation with an original 150 STOs as well as ongoing co-development with its 500+ STO membership:

1

To provide a combination of financial and non-financial support to STOs to enable their growth and greater social and economic impact in LCR.

2

To actively engage local individuals and communities who have ideas to generate community wealth. Some of these may not yet have established an STO – and may not consider themselves to be entrepreneurs – particularly in deprived areas.

3

To support meanwhile use and the long-term transfer of assets to STOs, which can kick-start regeneration, contributing to placemaking as part of LCR's spatial strategy.

Kindred exists to meet demand. In June 2017, the Heseltine Institute at the University of Liverpool estimated there were 1,400 social organisations, with an annual income of £3bn in the Liverpool City Region. They employ 45,000 people and own net assets of £4.4bn.

Based on detailed research, Seebohm Hill estimated that in 2019 a total of £11.3m was invested in 43 social organisations in LCR, with only half a million pounds of that in eight STOs. Estimates by the Kindred team of unmet demand for social investment across the region indicate 740 organisations in need of £35m of investment.

A key element of Kindred's purpose is to ensure that money is invested in social business because the evidence suggests that this delivers better returns – returns that are both financial and social and which deliver outputs and outcomes that would otherwise negatively impact communities and, in turn, cost more. Previous research has shown that community ownership, including on the high street, can deliver significant economic benefits. Community-owned spaces contribute £220m to the UK economy, and 56p of every £1 they spend stays in the local economy. The money Kindred invests will be used time and time again, as the investee businesses pay it forward, and value will be measured by both financial returns and social impacts.

Kindred is funded by Power to Change and Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Strategic Investment Fund to deliver a fairer, kinder and more inclusive economy. The creation and development of BlaST has been an important part of making real change happen in Kindred's contribution to that strategy.

06.

Kindred & BlaST

A consultation to establish Kindred in 2019 suggested that Black and mixed ethnic communities were least likely to identify as social enterprises, despite their business activity delivering demonstrable social impact.

This evaluation confirms that, prior to BlaST, most members had found social investment inaccessible or had just not heard of it.

Kindred's initial money round, delivered mid-pandemic, provided compelling evidence that the number of people of colour reached resulted directly from 'someone who looks like us'. Black leadership of BlaST and its emergence have resulted in 30% of Kindred's social enterprise investment pipeline coming from

People of Colour and 25% of investments being made in BlaST-led organisations.

However, the speed and confidence with which BlaST-led STOs draw on their money is markedly slower and lower than their white counterparts and consequently, additional peer support has been put in place.

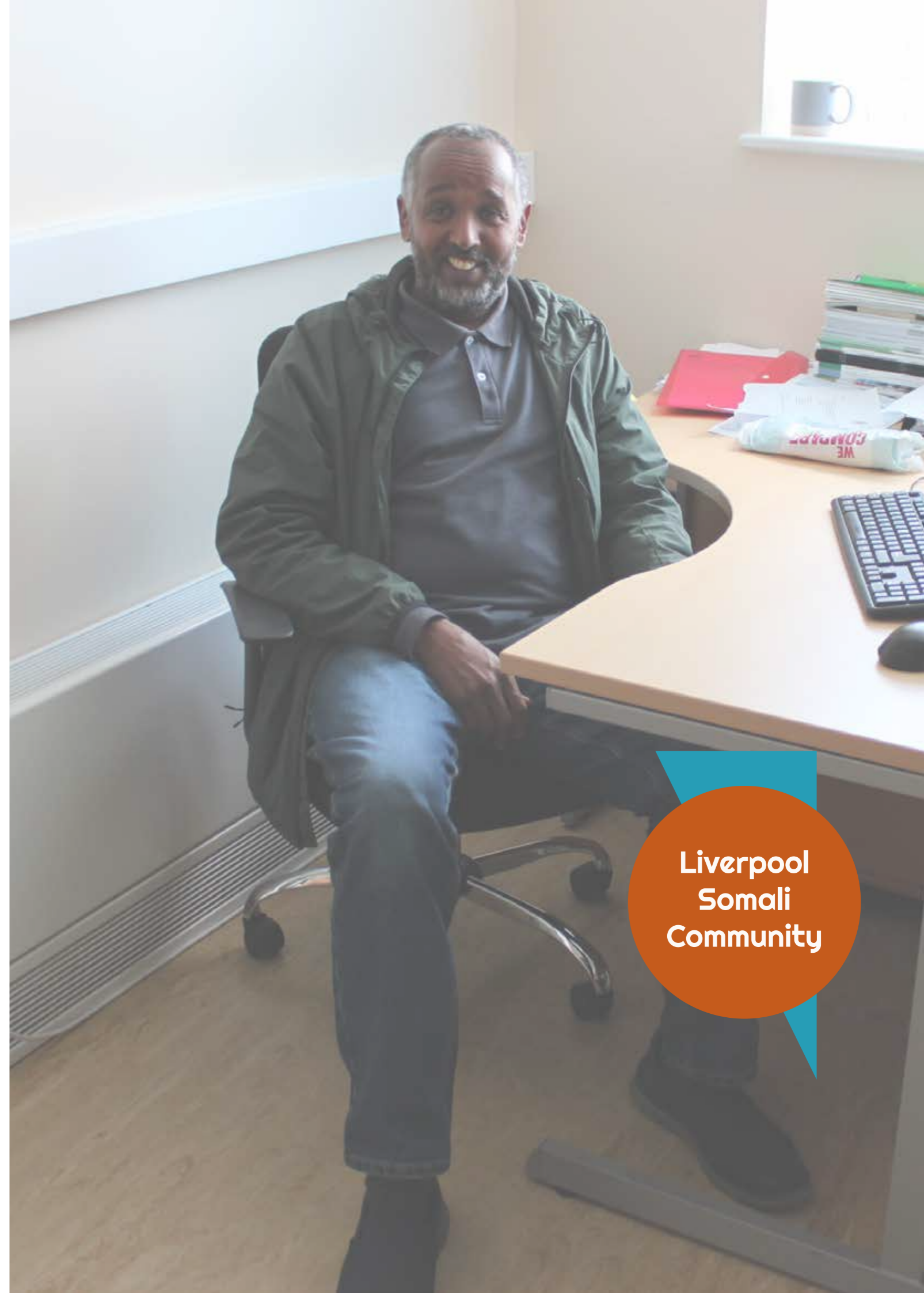
In 2021 BlaST's founder Joanne Anderson was supported by UnLtd – as part of its response to research into the added value resulting from people using their lived experience of social issues, such as homelessness and addiction, to drive social change. UnLtd's research shows that lived experience is critical to solving social issues and that there is a

leadership gap in the social sector between those who 'live' issues and those who 'solve' them.

BlaST's founder has now moved on to serve as Mayor of Liverpool but continues to place social value at the heart of all she does. She uses her convening powers to extend support for, and investment in, BlaST-led social business.

Another founder member of BlaST, Adele Myers, has recently been appointed by Kindred to work as part of the Kindred team and provide ongoing support and facilitation to the growing BlaST network.

If you would like to get involved in BlaST or find out more information, contact adele@kindred-lcr.co.uk.



Liverpool Somali Community

07.

The aim of BlaST is to:



- Raise the profile and improve the wealth of socially-trading organisations from Black and diverse ethnic backgrounds in the Liverpool City Region
- Help promote our work and communicate the positive social or environmental impact our businesses collectively have on both local communities and the economy
- Encourage businesses from Black and diverse ethnic backgrounds – and those thinking of starting a business – to self-identify as socially-trading organisations
- Increase access to the benefits of Kindred, UnLtd and other social investment and support opportunities regionally and nationally and influence that support to help deliver BlaST ambitions

08.

Background: the scale of the issue

Social Enterprise UK found that 13% of social enterprises nationally are led by People of Colour and yet only 2.6% of impact investment goes to Black-led social enterprises. 35% of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people aspire to set up a local or social enterprise, compared to 10% of white counterparts yet conversion to start up remains extremely low (Race Disparity Audit 2017).

Black-led enterprises generally are growing faster than average, yet attract under 1% of all investment.

The Social Metrics Commission showed Black households in the UK are over twice as likely to live in poverty as their white counterparts, leaving them disproportionately exposed to the job losses and pay cuts resulting from the pandemic.

One in ten young Black people are unemployed compared to one in 20 young white people.

The Runnymede Trust found Liverpool to be the third worst place in the UK to get a job for African or Arab men. It illustrated the ongoing persistent exclusion of Black and

other minorities across the region from employment, economic opportunity and wealth, which has been extensively documented and researched over a 30+ year period – without any resulting significant or systemic change.

The social costs and consequences of exclusion are also evident. For example, 15% of the UK population are People of Colour and are more likely to go to university than to prison, yet 25% of the prison population and 40% of those in youth custody are young People of Colour. Muslims account for 15% of prisoners – a

50% increase in ten years – despite being under 5% of the population.

Social enterprise is found to address entrenched social problems caused by income inequality (World Economic Forum, British Council and Social Enterprise UK). Yet our work with Kindred in Liverpool City Region found People of Colour operating in the socially-trading sector were least likely to identify as a social enterprise – despite their business activity delivering demonstrable social impact.

Successive STOs established by Black people and communities in Liverpool, including those ‘crowd funded’ by Black communities from their own funds, have been systematically closed down and had assets stripped from them by large public and charitable organisations. This asset stripping continues and of those that survive, most are in poor repair, lack investment and only survive as a result of voluntary activity.

Kevin Osborne, writing for *The Voice Online* suggests a Black-led investment fund can deliver fundamentally different outcomes because Black autonomy delivers better. The experience of the founding team of Kindred provides compelling evidence that People of Colour’s outcomes will directly result from ‘someone who looks like us’.

Kindred’s engagement work revealed that...

- BlaST members found social investment inaccessible
- Many had never heard of it. BlaST members were most likely to use their own personal funds to establish an STO
- Were more likely to inherit indebted STOs as Black leaders

Cycle of life



09. BlaST story so far

BlaST began delivery in March 2021 during lockdown. It was led by the then-BlaST lead, Joanne Anderson – also a member of the Kindred delivery team. With support from UnLtd, a series of online networking events took place aimed at building relationships and business opportunities for members of the Black and Brown socially-trading sector.

Examples include:

Procurement Workshop

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Lorna Rogers, Head of Mayoral Programmes will talk to us about future opportunities for Black organisations.

Paul Amann, Principle Officer, will take about some of the issues that come up for Black organisations in the procurement process.

Paula Ellis, Corporate Engagement Manager will talk about how to access the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority supplier list.

**9th March
4pm – 6pm**

Providing Services to Young People

Maggie O’Carroll Chief Executive, The Women’s Organisation

Maggie will help us to explore opportunities in working together and the feasibility of submitting a collective bid. Maggie’s organisation has undertaken the role of lead body on a number of consortiums that access European funding to deliver employability for underserved groups.

**11th March
12pm – 2pm**



Arts and music

Christine Spriggs, former NW Regional Executive Officer at the National Foundation for Youth Music, delivery team member at Kindred and bid writer.

Christine will facilitate the session to explore what opportunities there will be for collaborative working.

16th March
4pm – 6pm

Employing Young People

Jane Eme Power (FCIPD), Senior HR lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University

Jane will facilitate a workshop to explore opportunities for working together and some of the critical issues to consider when employing young people.

18th March
4pm – 6pm

Company Set-Up

Solicitors talk about different options for company set up



10. Initial BlaST programme



From these initial sessions, the BlaST network working group was established.

- The BlaST network working group met weekly from March 2021 onwards and included representatives from BrazUKa and Katumba, the Centre for Development, Cycle of Life, Café Laziz and others, feeding back to the community group.
- It organised the Black History Month programme of community events.

Other outcomes included:

- At least one STO took on Kickstarters
- A new coordinator was contracted to work with Kindred
- BlaST appointed an administrator

Black History Month BlaST programme

- It was decided to design, establish and run a new festival – the Routes and Roots festival.

11.

Routes and Roots festival

The festival was a two-week programme of community workshops that took place in October 2021 around Liverpool 8, as part of Black History Month. It was run by the Black-led businesses in the network, that were already delivering a range of services across the Liverpool City Region, culminating in the annual Halloween carnival event in Liverpool City Centre, with 450 local people taking part and an audience of 3,200.

Sessions included:

- Slavery walking tour
- African drumming and dance sessions
- Wellbeing evening
- Bike rides
- Spoken word events

... as well as coaching sessions and round table discussions

“As part of the programme, a wide range of social traders and leaders came together from diverse backgrounds to talk about issues and ‘provide resources so we could talk to each other about what we are gonna do together.’”

Juliana Pinheiro Landim
Creative Director, BrazUKa and Katumba and Routes and Roots festival lead

“It also became the opportunity for members of the African diaspora to come together for a series of dialogues, discussions and activities within the community to talk about BlaST, what it was and what it was for.”

12. BlaST network

Currently, the BlaST network is made up of an ad hoc group of organisations that are Black-led, as well as individual sole traders who work as part of that ecology or are seeking to establish a social or commercially-trading organisation. Private businesses that also deliver some social benefit or view their primary objective as service to their customers and community, as opposed to shareholders or private profit or benefit, appeared far more prevalent and

integrated than found in the wider commercial business community.

Between January and March 2021 the BlaST network was initiated and awards, with a combined total of £50,000, were invested in 23 BlaST-led STOs. Since then the BlaST network has continued to grow as a 'collaborating community'. (See Collaborating Communities on page 29)



Laurence Westgaph



Liverpool Somali Community

13. What is an STO?

Socially-trading organisations create social value AND trade commercially. STOs are businesses with a social mission, that collaborate and increase their impact by working together to make a positive difference in their local communities.

Socially-trading organisations are not limited to any particular legal form. They may include community businesses, community land trusts, community interest companies, social enterprises, cooperatives and some mission-driven companies, family businesses and local ventures who demonstrate social purpose through their actions and behaviour.



Waishee Coaching

14.

BlaST: the wider context

BlaST emerged as a result of the ‘collaborating communities’ approach taken by the Kindred team, which recognises collaboration and peer support between traders – rather than competition – and accelerates sustained economic growth. Both national research and the findings from the Kindred evaluation demonstrate that Black leadership is key.



Routes and Roots festival launch

“They do so much more together than working alone; a group that works together to create a bigger social impact.”

Joanne Anderson,
Mayor of Liverpool

15.

Collaborating communities

Collaborating communities enable both people and micro-businesses to overcome the limitations of their small size through mutual support and collaboration. Like industry clusters, they provide a growth-friendly ecology – but tend to be organised around a place, cause or community of interest, rather than an industry sector. Kindred’s own evaluation confirmed those STOs that are part of a collaborating community perform better than those working in isolation.

Creating opportunities for STOs to support each other is a key part of our work, measuring their impact to

provide better evidence. Unlike traditional business support, which encourages competitiveness, a collaborating community encourages collaboration, cooperation, the sharing of ideas and a culture in which mutual benefit is understood and practised.

Both Kindred’s and BlaST’s evaluations suggest that at least 50% of members, who weren’t part of a collaborating community when they first got involved, used the connections they made to improve or increase their trade. This networking helped facilitate peer-to-peer support, which was found by Power to Change

and Kindred research to be the preferred form of business support for STOs.

It is notable that, following the departure of the BlaST founder, some members felt the lack of leadership led to a lack of clarity of focus, suggesting that even a collaborating community requires leadership.

16.

BlaST evaluation: our approach

Members of the BlaST network, supported by Kindred, have led this evaluation. Both one-to-one and round table conversations with the BlaST network and wider community, influencers and stakeholders have helped us understand the issues and barriers to increasing the scale, number and social impact of BlaST-led businesses.

This evaluation tells the story of the BlaST journey by us, the members, reflecting our progress and identifying the actions required to grow our social impact. The evaluation will be used to influence the support that Kindred provides BlaST over the coming year and as a basis for wider discussions with other social investment and support opportunities.

Methodology

The evaluation has been gathered by BlaST network members using:

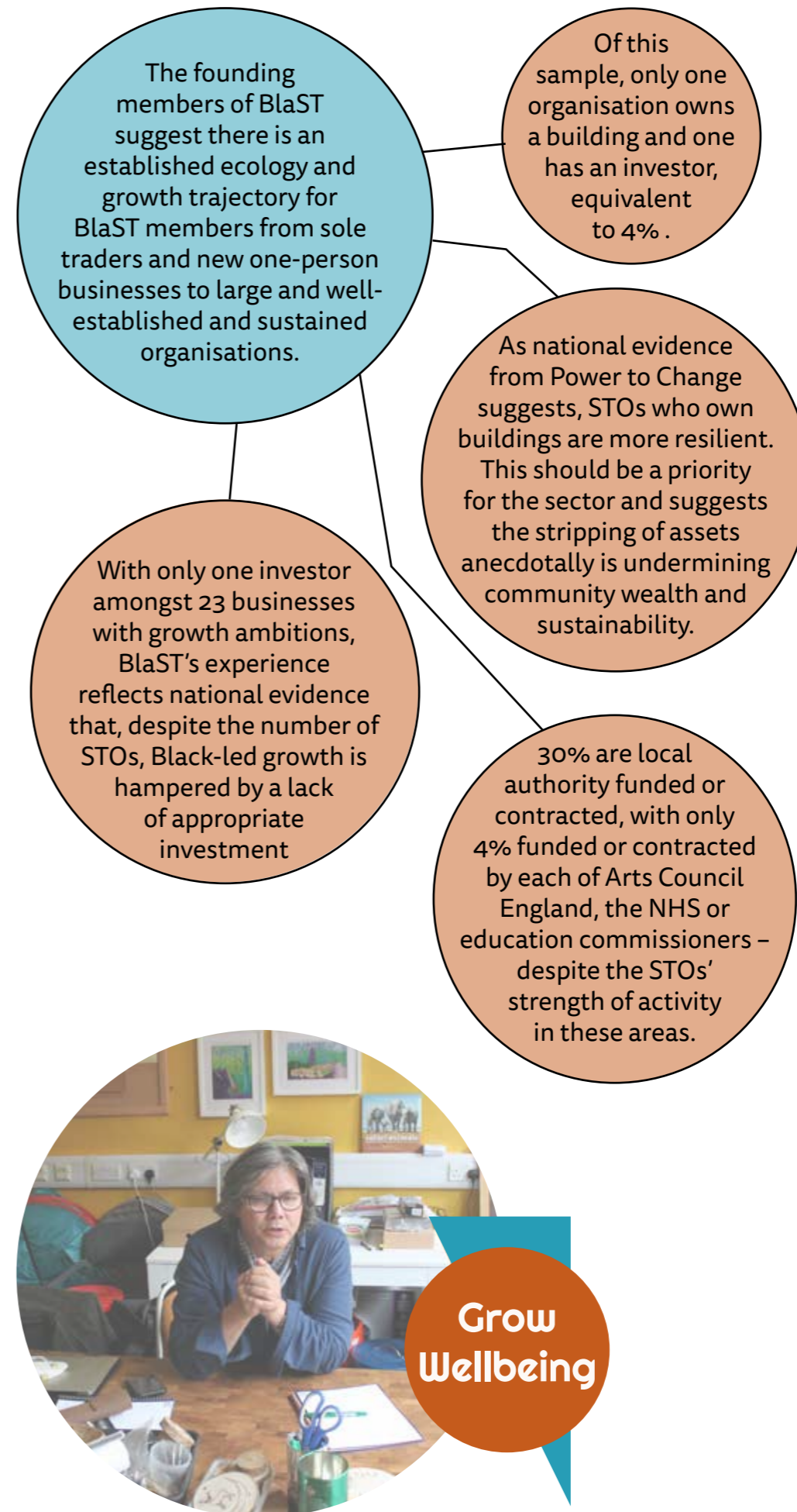
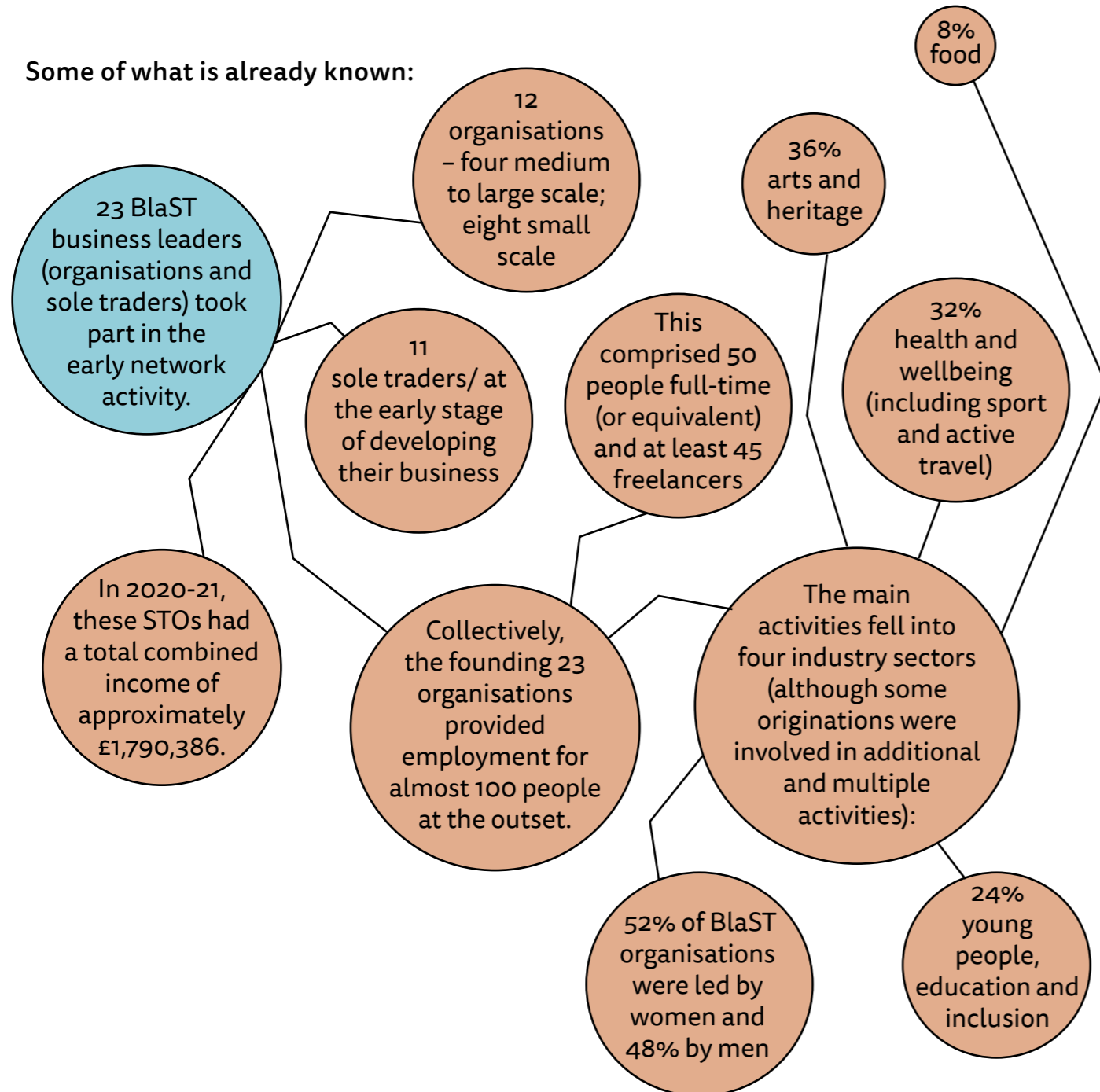
- Face-to-face interviews – both one-to-ones and group interviews. These were recorded and filmed
- Surveys
- Collecting background information
- Photographs and video footage of activity – in particular, but not only, of the Routes and Roots festival
- Desktop research
- Baseline information gathering
- Quantitative and qualitative data gathering

For the qualitative data collected, we asked all members of the network a series of questions about the experience of running an STO in LCR. The questions were:

- What have been the main barriers your organisation faced in the past?
- How did you get involved with BlaST?
- What do you think worked well with the BlaST process?
- What do you think could have gone better?
- What future plans do you/ your organisation have for the next three months/year/ three years?
- What would you need to take your business to the next level?
- Any suggestions for how we develop BlaST and how we can support the STO sector better?
- What did you know about the socially-trading organisation sector when you began, compared to now?

17. BlaST network baseline

Some of what is already known:



Baytree Catering



In summary, we found the following:

How long have you been trading?

Between one year and 25 years plus

What is the legal status of your business?

Most are charities, CICs, or sole traders; there are two private companies

Do you have a board or management committee?

Yes all the SMEs do

How many people work for you? (F-t / P-t or equivalent / freelance etc)

A total of over 50 full time or equivalent posts and 45+ freelancers (in 2021)

Do you have volunteers?

A total of over 110 volunteers in 2021

Are you based in a building? Do you own or rent it?

One organisation owns the building and seven rent an office or work space

Do you have investors?

One larger-scale STO said it did

Local Authority support

Seven organisations did (only one was not Liverpool City Council)

Other statutory body support included

Arts Council, Department of Education and Skills, NHS

Other charity or foundations etc included

Paul Hamlyn, British Council, Steve Morgan Foundation, PH Holt, Granada Foundation, LCVS, National Museums Liverpool, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Everyman & Playhouse and the WEA

18.

BlaST survey following financial support

Of the 23 BlaST network members approached, nine responded to the survey – which is equivalent to 42% of BlaST network members. This was split four female and five male.

Respondents represented a range of Black, Brown and diverse ethnic backgrounds and also include one White British respondent.

Those taking part in the survey led a range of STOs and businesses or worked as freelancers including:

- holistic health
- active travel
- sports
- arts and culture
- Black history

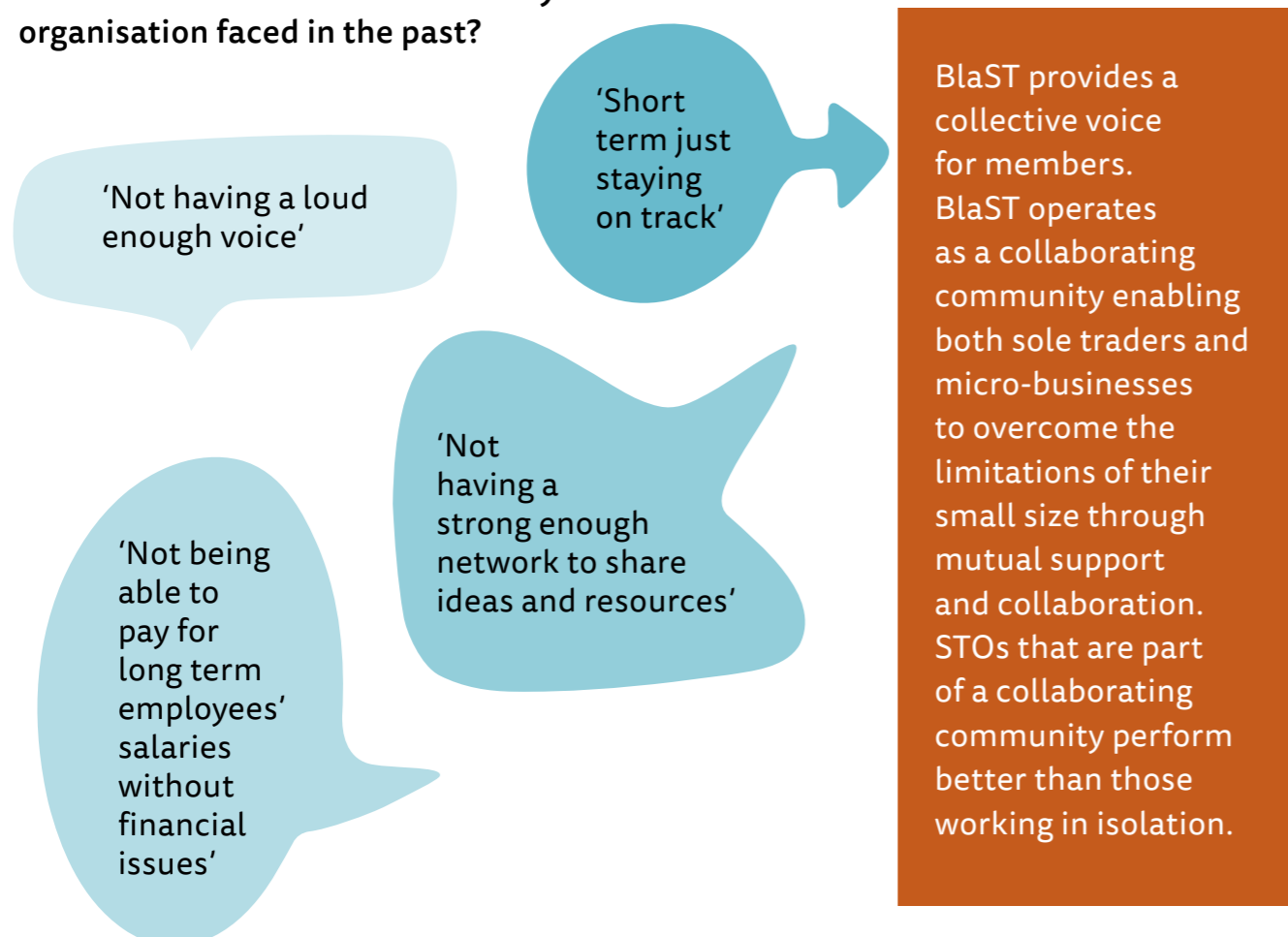
We also gathered qualitative data through in-depth interviews as part of the evidence base.

19.

Findings... How it's been going

In March 2021 each founding BlaST member received a micro award to expand its social impact. This evaluation is based on the impact of those original awards, a survey of recipients and more in-depth conversations with a sample of BlaST members.

What have been the main barriers your organisation faced in the past?



Barriers:

- 'Not having a loud enough voice'
- 'Short term just staying on track'
- 'Not having a strong enough network to share ideas and resources'
- 'Not being able to pay for long term employees' salaries without financial issues'

Summary: BlaST provides a collective voice for members. BlaST operates as a collaborating community enabling both sole traders and micro-businesses to overcome the limitations of their small size through mutual support and collaboration. STOs that are part of a collaborating community perform better than those working in isolation.

How did you get involved with BlaST?

'Through Kindred. They mentioned about the BlaST network... I was talking to a lot of people anyway and I knew them. I've been trying to collaborate with them, you know... and get together a network of people and I wanted to get more involved.'

'I moved to Liverpool from London and was immediately introduced to the BlaST network by Ibe, who I met through social media.'

'Obtaining contracts'

'Networking with other STOs'

What do you think worked well with the BlaST process?

'It was very organic, it was an opportunity for collaboration, networking with similar-minded organisations. We've been identifying issues we all face and finding tangible solutions to move forward which could be beneficial – and have a stronger voice together to make sure our needs were understood and met.'

'Feeling like I'm doing what I want to with my business but having the others feels like support although I'm just starting out in my new venture.'

'It was great to meet such a diverse group of STO leaders, whereas before I was often the only Person of Colour in the social enterprises circles'

'It's helped us to have a stronger voice to go out and speak to the wider community and other organisations and especially Liverpool City Region CA to ensure that our needs were understood and how they could be met.'

'To relate to others in terms of their challenges, successes, approaches, and last but not least to have a channel in which we can offer peer to peer support.'

'When we started we were in lockdown, so I had opportunities to have calls on Zoom which was great... and having organisations of creative people with the same common goal. It was really nice for me to kind of find my feet.'

'Personally, it has been gratifying to have been able to keep BlaST going. It's just the very beginning of something that can develop into greatness.'

'As I've been a health coach for over ten years, I get tired being a sole trader. Sometimes it can feel lonely – I feel like the network provides the teamwork I miss from being in employment.'

'It's helped us to move forward in ways that are tangibly beneficial.'

What do you think could have gone better?

More face-to-face meetings

'I think more organisation and structure – obviously I know it's early days! I came in thinking it was all set up and I was the new one. I then realised we were all quite new so it was like getting to know each other and navigating it and who was doing what...It's come a long way since then.'

'More opportunities for networking'

'Although I love working with Katumba and associate staff, there was a bit of confusion when different people were contacting me for the same bookings, leading to issues with agreed fees and booking details. This was all sorted out eventually, but could have led to confusion and double-booking issues.'

'I think having a more clear vision as we are in an embryonic stage can have a positive and negative effect: is positive to feel the impact of the vision but also means that not having clarity sometimes opportunities are missed. It will be even better once we have a clearer idea of what BlaST is/can be.'

'Communication was wanting at some points.'

'Having more experience to be more involved.'

'Understanding of each organisation, I believed the network was already set up; was not sure who was involved. Meet face-to-face to build rapport, experience each business, try to sell and market for each other.'

'To have had someone else lead on BlaST: it's been extremely challenging for me to lead on the BlaST working group, whilst organising the Routes and Routes festival and keep running my own organisation. I believe that having someone impartial, outside of the STOs – part of the network who can focus on supporting us and lead on coordinating the effort is crucial for BlaST's success and sustainability.'

'But in all, it was an amazing experience being part of the festival and I hope to do more positive work with the company and friends in the near future. Beautiful people, doing wonderful community work!'

'BlaST needs to understand in detail, what their needs are so BlaST can support those people better... Having said that, the positive is that it's very empowering.'

'I think getting an understanding of each individual within BlaST... what they do, what they offer.'

'Having more leadership involved so we know what's expected as we have amazing things to offer.'

'Not yet having a clear vision of what BlaST could and should be. Not having clarity means that some opportunities have been missed. And it's been difficult to convince other people (to get on board) because of that lack of clarity. People haven't benefited or got involved as much as they could have because they don't 'get it.'

What future plans do you/ your organisation have for the next three months/ year/ three years?

'We're looking to keep supporting BlaST in its expansion; to start social franchises nationally; to expand the staff and create new products as well as grow our annual Katumba Halloween Carnival and our new festival Routes and Routes within the community.'

'Continue to be a creative and community active.'

Employment growth

'To be able to pay for at least three employees' salary without financial issues.'

'We'd like to win a contract to deliver our cycling project within the L8 area, the wider area and have a stake in the decision-making process in active travel in the Liverpool City Region. And we'd like to be able to train up local people to be cycling instructors and to set up a cycling shop in L8. Working with the LCR CA.'

'Teaming up with other organisations, expansion of professional network – long-term run a retreat. Involve other organisations, building networks – business and personal'

What would you need to take your business to the next level?

'A lot of time and support'

'Advice, support and funding.'

'Secure, longer term funding so we can focus on development, strategy and growth.'

'I think, in terms of capacity building, having the expertise to manage a workforce and a bigger business would give me the confidence to know how to manage growth and making sure it's sustainable.'

'More marketing'

'Finances, collaboration, support, network, venue hire'

'At least 12 solid yearly contracts'

'Investment and admin support'

Any suggestions for how we develop BlaST and how we can support the STO sector better?

'I love that BlaST could add capacity building to its member organisations by securing contracts, or commissioning its partner organisations, build their capacity to grow.'

'Secure funding and tailored funding for the member organisations. Avoid being tokenistic towards Black people so we're not a box ticked, which becomes a vicious cycle.'

'Found a Kung fu class in Liverpool – My Heritage, found new people who are from my heritage. Learning and development is an important part in this process, not only for the people who access our services but also our own business.'

Hold events for artists and funding guidance.'

'Central body or person (website/hub) based on the needs of BlaST to find and commission funding. Website for service users funding per service user.'

'Also have an impact on the wider structures on how to prevent this tokenistic approach by authorities and those in power.'

'Continued inclusion as any partnerships will make us stronger and reach a wider audience.'

'I'd like to be in a position to help people from the migrant communities (which has been a big increase), to be able to help them to design new equipment or innovative solutions.'

What did you know about the socially-trading organisation sector when you began, and compared to now?

'None prior to my involvement'

'I felt as a transition from receiving grants to socially-trading was quite daunting for people who have been accustomed/educated to only rely on grants to move to the more independent, sustainable aspect of an STO. It's been important to have been able to learn from more experienced STOs on how you can move away from being totally grant reliant to more sustainable.'

'My thoughts on socially-trading was that the people I want to reach now will not necessarily be able to afford personal training. My background is corporate, but my passion is grass roots community engagement and development. I'm transitioning over to try to apply for funding to provide my services to young people.'

'Was part of the SSE (School for Social Entrepreneurs) programme for a couple of years, meaning that I was quite used to the term 'social enterprises' in that context and beyond. In my understanding, there's a lot of overlapping and perhaps only a semantic difference between social enterprises and socially-trading organisations.'

'Very little – we're driven more on passion than understanding how we can trade.'

'I've been involved in such enterprises most of my career.'

20.

Next steps

Next steps and targets for consideration by Kindred:

- Maintain the pipeline of BlaST accessing Kindred funds at 25%
- Equip ten additional BlaST members within the city region with micro grants in 2022, bringing the total to 30
- Support a target of seven BlaST members to become investment-ready
- Establish a collective BlaST baseline in order that collective growth and social impact can be measured
- Track and evidence the impact that Black-led STOs have, when compared with STOs that are not reflective of community
- Support the work of Kuumba Imani to establish a BlaST or Black-led business hub
- Incubate BlaST with a view to it becoming independent in the future

21.

Thanks

Below are listed the founding organisations of Blast and the initial BlaST network members:

Juliana Landim:
www.katumba.co.uk

Nicola Chan:
www.findmywai.com

Yaw Owusu:
thepmg.co.uk

Duane Chong:
www.grow-wellbeing.com

Kofi Owusu:
GoPlay Studio

Saeed Ibrahim:
Merseyside Somali and
Community Association

Anne London:
www.theflorrie.org

Shana Begum

Saeed Ibrahim:
Kalamoo Youth Association

Elizabeth O'Brien:
The Create Workshop

Jernice Easthope

Adele Myers:
Centre of Development

Tony Mangaroo

Keith Gabbidon Thompson:
Mind Moves Mobile Mentor
Services

Michelle O' Dwyer:
Bay Tree Caterers

Dave McTague:
Africa Oye

Ibe Hayter:
Cycle of Life

Paul Duhaney:
Africa Oye
Darlene Martin

Jennifer Reid:
backontrackededucation.co.uk

Disraeli

Madeline Heneghan:
writingonthewall.org.uk

Laurence Westgaph:
Liverpool Slavery Tours

Debra Hill:
Café Laziz

Carol Darby Darlton



kindred-lcr.co.uk/blast

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Fund**



 Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport



**power to
change**

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METROMAYOR
LIVERPOOL CITY REGION