



# Community Savers and CLASS 2023 Impact Evaluation

May 2024

# Glossary and abbreviations

## **Community Led Action and Savings**

**Support (CLASS):** A registered charity that works in alliance with Community Savers providing strategic, technical, and fundraising support.

**Financial inclusion:** This is about ensuring that people and households are able to access useful, affordable, and responsible financial products and services (savings, credit or insurance for example) that meet their specific needs.

**Financial resilience:** This relates to a person or a household's ability to cope with or recover from a sudden financial difficulty such as because of an illness, a bereavement or losing your job for example.

**Gendered poverty:** A term recognising that women are disproportionately affected by poverty in comparison to men because of their unequal position in the labour market and wider society. This is often exacerbated by other factors like being a care giver or a single mum for example.

## **Greater Manchester Tenants Union**

**(GMTU):** A democratic, member-led union representing members in the private and social rented sector.

## **Miles Platting Community and Age**

**Friendly Network (MPCAN):** A resident-led community network of projects, groups, and local residents focused on making Miles Platting and the surrounding area a great place to live.

**Muongano Wa Wanavijiji:** A Kenyan social movement with headquarters in Nairobi who have mentored the Community Savers leadership since 2018.

## **Naturally Occurring Retirement Community**

**(NORC):** A model for ageing well in place rather than needing to move away from home as you grow older grounded in a community-led approach and the promotion of more integrated neighbourhood services.

**One World Together:** A new fundraising movement focused on channelling unrestricted funds to grassroots initiatives and movements worldwide.

**Women of Wythenshawe (WoW):** A women-led poverty-action network focused on achieving systems change on gendered poverty and funded through the Smallwood Trust.

## **Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI):**

An international urban social movement with affiliates in 32 countries across the Global South which has inspired the emergence of the Community Savers movement in the UK.

**Theory of Change:** A theory of change describes how a particular organisation or group of people think that change happens and why it happens that way within a particular context. It is usually presented as a diagram including inputs, outcomes, and longer-term impacts.

**Turn 2 Us:** A national charity focused on financial resilience and wellbeing which is partnering with Community Savers for their Cost of Care programme in Manchester.

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# Introduction

Community Savers and CLASS are a cross-class alliance between an informal women-led poverty action network and a tailored professional support agency.

Community Savers affiliates are neighbourhood-based community associations with majority women leadership that take action to reduce poverty and inequality in their local areas. They join together through the Community Savers movement for a stronger collective voice on social, economic, and climate justice.

The building blocks of the Community Savers movement are women-led and community-based savings clubs. The Community Savers methodology and theory of change is an adaptation of a 30-year strong social movement called Shack/Slum Dwellers International.

Community Savers leaders direct the movement through a variety of co-governance mechanisms, working together with CLASS staff and trustees. These include quarterly network meetings for the full leadership across all Community Savers neighbourhoods; an elected Leadership Team that makes decisions and assists the CLASS Director between network meetings; and two rotational seats for Community Savers leaders on the CLASS board (with one new representative elected each year).

We follow a learning-by-doing methodology, where regular reflection and evaluation is critical. We conduct an annual impact evaluation between January and March; this report captures our outcomes and learning between January and December 2023.

We draw our findings from:

- An impact survey with 42/136 (31%) members of Community Savers affiliated groups.
- 19 semi-structured interviews with community leaders (from across affiliated groups and networks and the Women of Wythenshawe project).
- 3 leadership reflections during the 2023 calendar year (drawing on MPCAN reflections and the Community Savers annual retreat and end of year Strategy Day discussions).
- 7 partner surveys (responses to an anonymised google form).
- 7 semi-structured interviews with staff from partner agencies in the Women of Wythenshawe project.
- A review of our internal documentation throughout the 2023 calendar year.

In this report, “we” means the Community Savers-CLASS alliance because some of the outcomes and achievements detailed here are a result of our constant co-production and co-governance. Where we are directly attributing something to a group, the Community Savers leadership, or the CLASS team, we make this clear and reference those contributors.

We report on CLASS’s analysis of Community Savers/CLASS achievements against our Theory of Change outcomes grid in Section 4 interspersed with direct quotes from members, leaders, and partners. We also share leaders’ reflections on progress and what we have learned directly in Section 5.



# 2023 At a glance

**Jan**

Smallwood Trust Learning Network: WoW's first opportunity to exchange with sister networks Birmingham 'No Recourse to Public Funds' and 'Coventry Women's Partnership' to develop a shared understanding of place-based systems change.

**Feb**



Launch of Dandelion Savers with peer support from Miles Platting Savers.

WoW member groups begin local consultations on priority issues for systems change on gendered poverty in Wythenshawe.

**Mar**

First full WoW Network meeting: women from diverse backgrounds share their stories and begin developing their shared vision and values.

Learning exchange on design and build projects & effective contestation of exclusionary development with Beth Chitekwe-Biti, SDI secretariat. Leaders from across Manchester prioritise collective voice on social housing.

**Apr**

3-day training sparks the beginning of a learning journey for Community Savers on neurodiversity and inclusive practice.

Leaders from Arbourthorne, Hulme, and Wythenshawe teach urban informality students about the value of South-North learning exchange in Sheffield.

Brinnington Savers receive a Big Local Award "in recognition of their selfless and tireless efforts as volunteers in the Brinnington community."

**May**

Relaunch of the Ageing Well in Place in Hulme partnership focused on the Hopton Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) pilot following One Manchester restructure.

WoW Network #2: Storytelling and capturing local priorities.

**June**



Hopton tenants share learning from the Hopton NORC with Brinnington tenants and Stockport Homes

Launch of 'One World Together' – Community Savers one of four founding partners for this radical new approach to funding grassroots transformation.

Turn2Us: Workshop to develop the new 'Cost of Care' partnership with Hulme Community Leaders and CLASS leading to "Meredith Matters".

**July/  
Aug**

WoW Network #3: Leaders prioritise systems change on domestic abuse, the housing crisis, and the crisis in special educational needs provision.

Launch of MPCAN's own dedicated website ([www.mpcan.org.uk](http://www.mpcan.org.uk)).

Annual retreat in Llandudno: positive progress review; further development of leadership team roles; lessons from SDI on growth and change ('don't kill the movement by letting professionals take up more space as you grow').

**Sept**

WoW Network #4: Community reporter training and analysis – what stories to tell, who to influence, how to ensure ethics and inclusion.

Woodhouse Park Councillors meet WoW leaders and support new proposal for a Woodhouse Park Community Network.

Discussions begin with St Leonard's Church, Arbourthorne Primary School, and the Neighbourhood team about an Arbourthorne Community Network.

**Oct**

MPCAN launch Social Homes for Miles Platting attracting 200 residents who marched to their first target site for social housing adjacent to Jigsaw Homes offices: Arbourthorne and Wythenshawe leaders join and learn.

WoW Housing Action and MPCAN catalyse Social Homes 4 Manchester together with CLASS: a city-wide campaign coalition to address the housing crisis in Manchester.

**Nov**



Visit from Muungano Wa Wanavijiji – our Kenyan mentors on a teaching visit to Manchester.

Leadership Team confirms Women in Community Action Arbourthorne's affiliation with Community Savers.

**Dec**

End of year strategy day and party. New Leadership Team elected.

# 2023 in numbers

**1,300** 

At least 1,300 people benefited directly from Community Savers action.

**£18,451** 

Savings groups collected a total of £18,451 new deposits.

**175%** 

Affiliated groups experienced a 175% increase in non-savings income with support from CLASS.

**40** 

CLASS convened or directly provided 48 hours of skills-based training. At least 40 different leaders have attended these sessions from nine different neighbourhoods.

**24 hrs** 

24 hours of leadership dialogue, reflection, and learning took place across our quarterly network meetings, annual retreat workshops, and December strategy day.

**7** 

7 Leadership Team meetings with the CLASS Director.

**7** 

7 hours of university and community-based teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate students by Community Savers leaders.

**170 hrs** 

At least 170 hours of in-person CLASS development and facilitation support provided to campaign and community meetings across Manchester and Sheffield.

**54 hrs** 

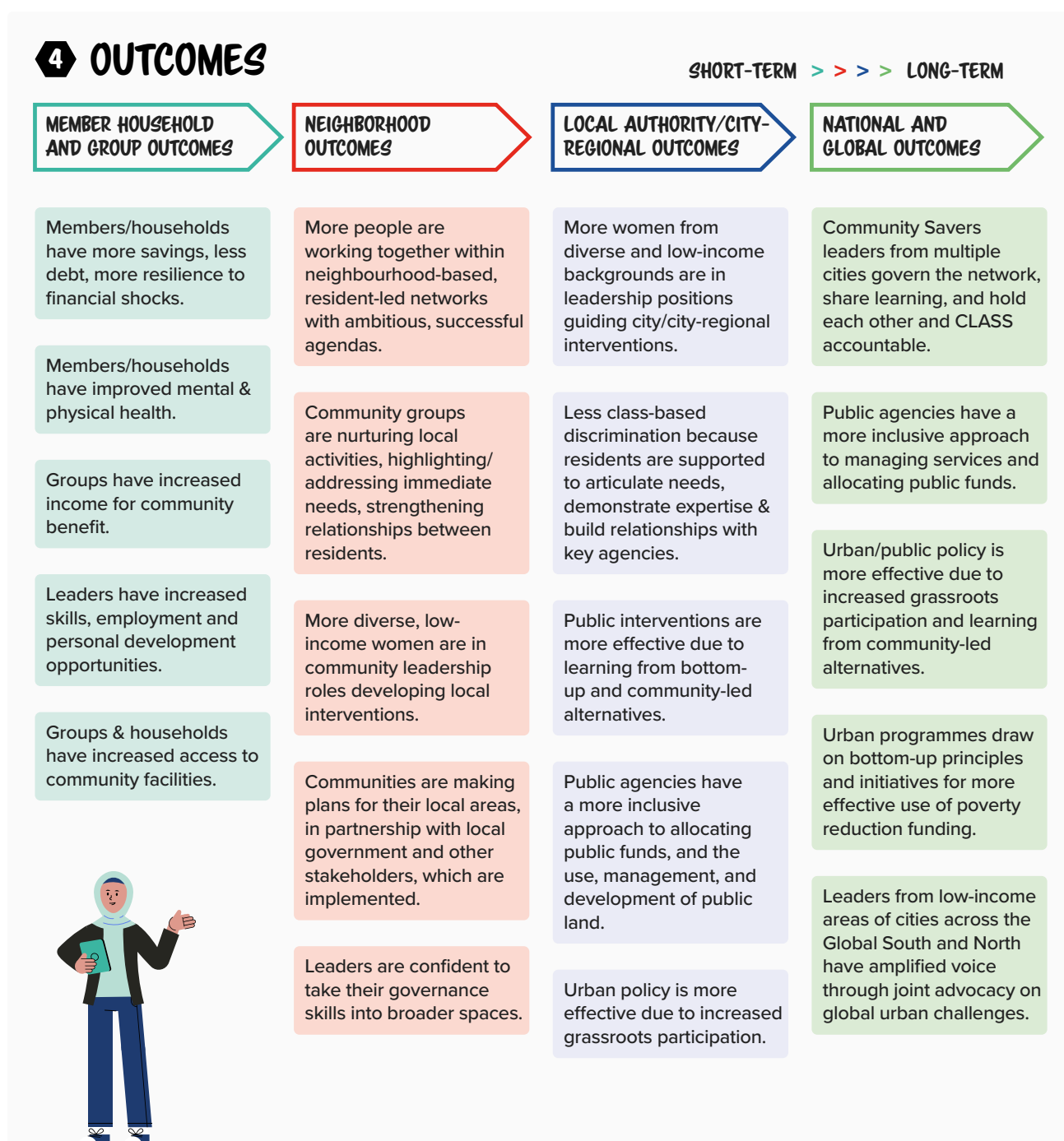
At least 54 hours of in-person dialogue, partnership development and advocacy work with public or voluntary sector stakeholders was invested by Community Savers leaders.



Image: MPCAN teaching students

# Outcomes

We have structured our evaluation and presentation of findings around our Theory of Change outcomes grid (below). Member household and group outcomes are drawn from our members survey and interviews with group leaders. This does not capture estimated numbers of direct beneficiaries from our work which we explain further below.





# Beneficiaries

## Estimated direct beneficiaries: 1,300.

In addition to data on our affiliated groups' memberships and savings schemes, we also worked with existing affiliates to estimate the number of people that they think they have directly benefited in 2023. This varies significantly across groups because there are so many different kinds of activities being delivered. Some groups are running food/clothes collection and food parcel delivery services, others are organising consultations and action for the physical transformation of their neighbourhood.

We defined direct beneficiaries as people who had received a tangible material good or benefit as an individual which can be attributed to the hard work of Community Savers groups and networks (for example: information, food, clothing, crisis grants, training, access to a service or drop-in etc). There is also a much higher number of indirect beneficiaries from our work. These are the people who have benefited from an additional service or facility being delivered close to where they live, or who will benefit from the improved environment after MPCAN's Climate Action work, or where members report an increased sense of 'community' and 'social connectivity' in their local area as a direct result of the work we do.

Indirect beneficiaries also include all the partners we work with who share with us informally how they benefit from working with us in terms of increased understanding of grassroots experiences, needs and priorities; or in terms of learning from our approach as evidenced by some of our partners responses below.

*"CLASS has been important in drawing together links with a range of stakeholders, including partners in UoM and MMU, both of whom have benefited from work with CLASS."*

*"[They are] influencing public and voluntary sector agencies to adopt a more co-produced approach in their work."*

*"Turn2us really values this partnership and what we are learning from CLASS."*

**Responses from Partners Survey 2023**

# 2023 Outcomes summary

## Member household and group outcomes in 2023

### ► Members/households have more savings, less debt, more resilience to financial shocks.

- At least 1,300 people benefited from Community Savers action.
- Affiliated groups collected a total of £18,451 in savings deposits.
- 67% of members survey respondents said being a member of their savings group had changed the way they think about how to manage money or the importance of saving.
- 30% of members survey respondents said they had been able to avoid paying for things on credit at some point during the year because of membership of their savings group.

### ► Members/households have improved mental & physical health.

- 95% of members survey participants feel more positive about life.
- 74% of members survey participants feel less socially isolated.
- 83% of members survey participants have improved mental health.

### ► Groups have increased income for community benefit.

Affiliated groups experienced a 175% increase in non-savings income. Our one affiliated community network, MPCAN, experienced an 685% increase in income due to their GM Green Spaces grant!

### ► Leaders have increased skills, employment, and personal development opportunities.

- 26 Community Savers leaders have benefited from the opportunity to provide consultancy services through their affiliated groups on teaching, peer support work, public speaking or city level/national level engagements and advocacy work.
- Our skills-based training programme has been attended by at least 40 different leaders in the current reporting period from across all nine neighbourhoods of operation.
- We have created PAYE employment opportunities for two low-income women from within our neighbourhoods of operation.

► **Groups & households have increased access to community facilities.**

- A three-bedroom ground floor flat is being renovated into a shared community space for older and vulnerable tenants at Hopton Court tower block in Hulme following two years of negotiation by Aquarius Community Savers with One Manchester Ltd.
- Mums Mart women’s space renovation is fully designed, fully approved at Planning, and the lease was signed in April 2024 with works due to be completed by November 2024.
- MPCAN have commissioned a project management team who have taken the redevelopment of St Cuthberts church through to RIBA stage 3 in partnership with the PCC and community leaders. They are now developing an investment plan. A new CIO has been established in 2024 as a legal entity able to lease land from the Church of England and manage the development of the new community facilities in the years to come.

## Neighbourhood outcomes in 2023

► **More people are working together in neighbourhood-based, resident-led networks with ambitious, successful agendas.**

- Please see detail below about the amazing progress made by MPCAN including helping to catalyse new neighbourhood networks in Arbourthorne and Woodhouse Park.

► **More diverse, low-income women are in community leadership roles developing local interventions.**

- The total number of Community Savers members in leadership roles increased from 23 to 36.
- 21% of the Community Savers leadership identified as being from a minority ethnic background.
- Seven leaders took up wider community leadership roles in their neighbourhoods and/or cities.
- The Women of Wythenshawe initiative brought together 37 women leaders from ten different community and service user groups including Carers; SEND parents; women with autism and learning disabilities; women seeking asylum or recently granted leave to remain; survivors of domestic abuse; and women from diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- Our impact survey with 42/136 savings group members (who may take on leadership roles within groups and the movement over time) found that:
  - 79% of participants identified as women and 21% as men.
  - 31% identified as minority ethnic.
  - 67% were social housing tenants (other respondents were homeowners or private renters).
  - 50% identified as having a learning disability, physical disability, or Long-Term Condition.
  - 67% identified as having a mental health condition or anxiety/depression.
  - 22% identified as being a Carer.

► **Communities are making plans for their local areas, in partnership with local government and other stakeholders, which are implemented.**

- Leaders of Aquarius Community Savers working together with Over-50s tenants of Hopton Court tower block achieved commitment to a full lift replacement, renovation of a 3-bed flat into a new tenant-governed community space, and investment in a programme of social events in 2023.
- Tenants have built on these successes to catalyse a new partnership with Turn 2 Us to roll out their approach to the neighbouring block through Meredith Matters. This project will explore the impacts of the social care system on financial resilience among high-rise tenants.

► **Community groups are nurturing local activities, highlighting/addressing immediate needs, strengthening relationships between residents.**

- Aquarius Community Savers are working in partnership with On Top of the World project to run their savings club as part of the weekly social and drop in regularly attended by over 30 local residents. Hopton Court tenants are running weekly breakfast club sessions and a programme of social activities drawing on funding from Ageing Well in Place project.
- Brinnington Savers are running a weekly savings club, organising summer days out and a Christmas meal and providing elderly and vulnerable members with advocacy and signposting support.

- Dandelion Savers are managing crisis funds for their community; running a weekly savings club as part of The Dandelion Community Wednesday drop in and food bank; with wrap around activities including days out for disadvantaged families.
- Miles Platting Savers have formed a community committee for administration of a small grant fund for local households from Henry Smith Foundation together with Parish Church of the Apostles. They are also running a weekly coffee morning and volunteering on the local Social Supermarket pilot with Greater Together Manchester.
- Mums Mart are running weekly Friday savings and lunch club, holding quarterly tabletop sales and family fun days and taking disadvantaged families on weekends away while also continuing to organise food parcels and collections for elderly and vulnerable people.
- Women in Community Action Arbourthorne are running a neighbourhood uplift project, involving street clean ups, upcycling fly-tipped furniture and donating it to families in need, and gardening interventions for households who are struggling to maintain things due to age or health issues.
- The Women of Wythenshawe initiative strengthened the ability of ten women-led member groups to provide peer support and direct services across a whole range of local needs in 2023.

► **Leaders are confident to take their governance skills into broader spaces.**

- Roy (Aquarius) has taken up a role on the Patient Participation Group for his local GP Commissioning group following his work on Ageing Well in Place in Hulme.
- Bernard (Aquarius) has taken up a role on the One Manchester Scrutiny Committee following work on Ageing Well in Place in Hulme.
- Kamila (WoW); Lina (WoW); Sheila (MPCAN); and Ellie (MPCAN) have all taken up representative roles within the Social Homes for Manchester coalition Steering Group.

► **More women from diverse and low-income backgrounds are in leadership positions guiding city/city-regional interventions.**

- Kamila (WoW); Lina (WoW); Sheila (MPCAN); and Ellie (MPCAN) have all taken up representative roles within the Social Homes for Manchester coalition Steering Group.

► **Public interventions are more effective due to learning from bottom-up and community-led alternatives.**

- One Manchester's provision to elderly and vulnerable tenants has improved directly in response to the work of Aquarius Community Savers and Hopton tenants, including reduced social isolation; improved access to health and social care services; increased provision of aids and adaptations; complete lift replacement to be carried out at the block.
- Wythenshawe Community Housing Group are accumulating learning about women-led and community-led poverty action through partnering with us on the WoW initiative.
- The St Cuthberts Communities Together project has great potential to contribute to improved housing and health and social care provision in Miles Platting and Collyhurst South.

## City/City-regional outcomes

► **Less class-based discrimination because residents are supported to articulate needs, demonstrate expertise & build relationships with key agencies.**

We have not managed to find a way to evaluate this yet. We believe that we have achieved this in some public agencies through co-production partnerships, although some public agencies would not be open to admitting that this kind of discrimination exists! We hope the Social Homes for Manchester campaign will play a big role in debunking myths about social housing and social housing estates. We will be making films and creating campaigns about this in 2024.



► **Public agencies have a more inclusive approach to allocating public funds, and the use, management, and development of public land.**

- Manchester City Council are now working in partnership with the Social Homes for Manchester coalition with the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing in support of our call for 30% social homes to be included in all new developments and for this to be enacted in local policy including the new Local Plan for Manchester (due to be published in draft in 2024).
- The Executive Member for Housing has agreed to work with us and the Bishop of Manchester to establish a new Manchester Social Housing Commission for the development of practical recommendations and multi-scaled advocacy, focused on increasing ecologically sustainable social housing provision across the city.

► **Urban policy is more effective due to increased grassroots participation.**

We have worked with ward councillors and through the Social Homes for Manchester Coalition to make the new Local Plan for Manchester work better for the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities in our city. We await the draft Local Plan to find out if this work has been effective. Our advocacy work includes:

- Changing the planning zone boundaries to take the Aquarius and St Georges estates (home to our Ageing Well in Place partnership) out of the city centre planning zone and into the inner south planning zone (with a greater emphasis on residential areas and community facilities).
- Changing language on 'affordable housing' so all policy is specific in distinguishing between homes for social rents (50-60% market value) and homes for 'affordable rents' (80% market value).
- Enacting into policy that 30% of all new housing development must be homes for social rent and minimise environmental impacts.
- Ensuring new housing development within the Wythenshawe Civic Centre redevelopment includes 30% homes for social rent.

# Member household and group outcomes

► **Members/households have more savings, less debt, more resilience to financial shocks.**

- 30% of savers said they had been able to avoid paying for things on credit at some point during the year because of being a member of their savings group.

## Community Savers in numbers

Total number of Community Savers (CS) affiliated groups/ networks:	
Jan 2023: <b>8</b>	Jan 2024: <b>8</b>

Total number of individual members across the CS network:	
Jan 2023: <b>97</b>	Jan 2024: <b>136</b>

Total number of committee members/ leaders across affiliated groups:	
Jan 2023: <b>23</b> (F:21 / M:2)	Jan 2024: <b>36</b> (F:33 / M:3)

Savings turnover (2019 is a useful pre-COVID benchmark)	
Total deposits in 2019: <b>£5,137</b>	Total withdrawals in 2019: <b>£1,196</b>
Total deposits in 2022: <b>£13,776</b>	Total withdrawals in 2022: <b>£11,351</b>
Total deposits in 2023: <b>£18,451</b>	Total withdrawals in 2023: <b>£11,346</b>

Our impact survey with 42/136 (31%) of members of Community Savers affiliated groups also generated the following findings:

- 67% of savers said being a member of their savings group had changed the way they think about how to manage money or the importance of saving.

*“Being a member of Savers has helped me to plan and budget.”*

**Member, Aquarius Savers**

*“It’s nice not to have brown envelopes through the post! Saving money is so important to me now instead of going to family members to lend me money.”*

**Member, Dandelion Savers**

What are you saving for?	
Christmas/gifts for family members	12
Holidays or wellbeing activities	12
Emergencies/a rainy day	8
Food, clothes, regular bills	4
Furniture/home improvements	3

*“Due to the cost-of-living crisis, most of my earned money goes on necessary expenditure, however the saving money goes on non-necessary, like items that can promote health and wellbeing; dental treatment; seeing family abroad; and driving lessons.”*

**Member, Aquarius Community Savers**

## ► Members/households have improved mental and physical health.

- 95% of members feel more positive about life.
- 74% of members feel less socially isolated.
- 83% of members report having better mental health.

*“1000%. It’s brought me out. I was depressed and used to stay in, but I came here one day, and it just felt so lovely and warm and welcoming.”*

**Member, Miles Platting Savers**

*“We’re breaking that isolation really to people who are at home on their own. Getting them more involved with other people and encouraging people to interact. Bringing the community together. They’re making friends, just having fun basically! A few of our savers have mobility issues as well so even just to get them out is great. And they can see that they can do things even if you’ve got mobility issues. Just showing them that they can do it, and nothing is a boundary.”*

**Committee member, Brinnington Savers**



Image: Brinnington Savers on a Saturday in 2023

## Case study

“I was a mother of two caring for both my Grandma and my disabled Aunt. I had been a Carer in some capacity all of my adult life. My Grandma passed away in 2015 and all of a sudden, I didn’t quite know what to do with myself. All I’d known was caring for others.

Time went on and my mental health declined, before I knew it, I could not go out of the house alone.

I was told about the Community Savers at a local project run at my children’s school, I was so interested that for the first time in years, I agreed to go out and on a learning exchange to Mums Mart in Manchester. Hearing the ladies talk about what they did and the changes they have accomplished it inspired me to come home and create our own Community Savers group.

Since that moment at Mums Mart my life has changed completely! I have been given so many fantastic opportunities, things that would have been an impossibility for me before. I really truly believe that being part of Community Savers has not only improved my quality of life but also those around me.

It may seem small to some but being part of Community Savers has given me the confidence to now be in Full Time employment, drive, travel by train alone and be an active member in my community.

These may be small to some, but they are things that I thought would never be possible in early 2020!”

**Georgie, Chair, Women in Community Action Arbourthorne.**

*“It helps with depression as I’m not on my own”*

**Member, Aquarius Community Savers**

## ► Groups have increased income for community benefit.

Affiliated community groups experienced an average 175% increase in non-savings income for community benefit in 2023: a total of £23,281 across eight affiliated groups during the year.

As an affiliated neighbourhood network, MPCAN experienced a 685% increase in income which included initial instalments of their £40,000 grant from the GM Green Spaces fund.

*“All of the change we have fought for has been supported by CLASS through administration support, training, and grant applications.”*  
**MPCAN Leader**

*“The relationship with CLASS is central to it. Without [it] there probably wouldn't be an MPCAN or it would be completely different... That support is central.”*  
**MPCAN Leader**

## ► Leaders have increased skills, employment, and personal development opportunities.

- 3 trustees (including 2 community savers leaders), and 1 staff member at CLASS attended NCVO's one day training in Charity Financial Management.
- 14 leaders and 3 CLASS staff members participated in a four-part training programme in Mental Health, Neurodiversity and Suicide Awareness in April-May 2023. This included a series of 4-hour workshops on deepening



Image: Community Reporter Training 2023

understanding of common mental health conditions and different presentations of neurodiversity; having conversations with people about mental health and neurodiversity; developing inclusive practices as community groups; and suicide awareness and safeguarding.

- A number of leaders requested additional training on their rights within the school system: 10 leaders and 1 CLASS staff member then participated in a two hour SEND Law and Schools online workshop as a spin off from the main neurodiversity training.
- 21 leaders and 9 support agency staff attended the Women of Wythenshawe Community Reporter training programme (three four-hour workshops) providing a foundation in how to document and share your community's life experiences and stories taking an ethical approach to ensuring they are seen, heard, and understood.
- 13 leaders and 4 support agency staff attended the Women of Wythenshawe Safeguarding for Community Groups training including practical support to review or create a new set of Safeguarding policies and procedures for member groups.



*“All [the training] has been excellent to assist with building our skills and confidence as leaders in running our groups and taking part in campaigning.”*  
**Committee member, Dandelion Savers**

*“Our committee members have benefited from training and skills development. We’ve definitely got stronger and more determined.”*  
**MPCAN Leader**

*“The Safeguarding training was informative, practical and pitched at the right level.”*  
**WoW Leader**

Findings from our evaluation interviews show that:

- 89% of leaders said their committee has additional knowledge, skills, and ideas for supporting our community.
- 100% of leaders said their committee’s ability to manage money effectively and transparently has improved.
- 78% said their committee’s ability to manage their membership and communicate with our community has improved.
- 89% said their committee’s ability to do forward planning has improved.

*“I feel inspired by MPCAN because it’s taught me that I can do things I never thought I could do. It’s given me courage to do things I never thought I could do. It’s opening my mind. And I think if I can do it and pass it onto someone, they can do the same- you’re helping others and yourself. I just want to thank MPCAN for helping me to see and learn new things.”*  
**MPCAN Leader**

Through the Women of Wythenshawe initiative, we have created an entry-level post, with the aim of enabling someone to work 7 hours per week, gaining valuable training and skills while remaining inside the threshold of their UC working allowance.

## Case Study

“Getting a job with CLASS and Women of Wythenshawe has been very emotional for me!

I came to the UK from Sri Lanka in 2011 with my family, and for a long time I was just at home being a housewife and mum. I had never worked in my life, and I was always at home, but during COVID I saw a message from The Dandelion Community saying they needed volunteers.

Then at Dandelion in January, we started up a new group called Dandelion Savers and this was really helpful for me because I didn’t ever use money before, my husband managed all the finances and looked after everything very well. Since I became Treasurer at Dandelion Savers it was so good for me because I learned how to use money, how to manage money, going to the post office and using an ATM – I had never used those things, or even at the shops, or going on the bus, I had never used money. I never travelled on my own!

So, I have learned so much, and then this year, I was so pleased to get a job as Admin Assistant supporting the Women of Wythenshawe network! It’s unbelievable to me, I thought I was never going to work in my life I thought I would be a housewife for ever! But my children started asking me questions like “mum, why do you not go to college; why are you not working?” They see their friends’ mums working so they wonder. And now, I give them £10 from my salary as pocket money and it makes me so happy! And they are already good savers – they save £5 for savings, £5 for snacks!

**Fathima, Admin Assistant (WoW), CLASS, and Treasurer, Dandelion Savers**



## ► Groups & households have increased access to community facilities

### Hopton Court Community Space renovation

Following two years of advocacy and partnership working driven by Aquarius Community Savers, One Manchester have agreed to renovate a ground floor three-bedroom apartment into a community space. The space aims to combat social isolation and mental health challenges experienced by older and vulnerable people at Hopton Court tower block in Hulme, Manchester. This has been achieved through the Ageing Well in Place in Hulme partnership catalysed by tenant organising in 2021 with participation from a local GP practice, and two local universities. The renovation is set to commence in summer 2024. One third of Hopton Court's tenants are suffering from anxiety and depression and the neighbourhood has some of the worst health inequality statistics for Older People living in Deprivation in England.

### Mums Mart Women's Space renovation

Participatory design work for renovating a derelict first floor Caretakers flat into a women-led social space began in 2019 but progress slowed due to COVID and long delays within the internal processes of acquiring a lease from the Methodist Church. After agreeing the Head Terms for the lease in July 2022, Mums Mart and CLASS have learned a great deal from two years of further negotiation! We are delighted to have recently signed the lease and work is due to commence in June 2024. The completed project will create a free to use community space for women's groups across the Wythenshawe area for at least ten years (a five-year lease with option to renew under the same terms for another five years). Our thanks go to the National Lottery



Image: Dandelion Savers first savings meeting - Feb 2023



Image: The derelict caretakers flat

Community Fund without whose support and patience this project would not have made it to the finish line! We would also like to thank the Smallwood Trust and the Women of Wythenshawe assessment panel who approved a small uplift grant to cover recent cost inflations.



- iii. building the capacity of Wythenshawe schools to provide good quality SEND support;
- iv. women-led enterprise development.

*“By joining the Women of Wythenshawe, this gave them the chance to meet other people, speak to people in English. Every time they meet them, they are more confident... they can speak about themselves. Like I have one of the ladies who was able to speak in front of an MP last year in the International Women’s Day. So, I think there is a big progress that I can see on the group, the members of the group that we are running.”*  
**Wow Support Worker**

*“It’s been a joy to be part of such a well organised network... moving into campaigning as well, looking at gender-based poverty and the common things that appear to be keeping certain groups of women in poverty, this has been an eye opener, as most leaders just tend to focus on running their community groups... The WOW Network was supported with the Community Reporter Training, then the Systems Change Mapping, and the decision to focus on three main groups that tend to cause women gender-based poverty, with WOW members choosing which group they wanted to be part of, this is helping towards developing relationships and community building. The development and the training is benefiting members with regards to skill building, confidence building and improving the administration and paperwork and systems involved in running a successful community group. I and the WoW Network members who attend meetings and training have learnt a lot.”*  
**WoW Leader**

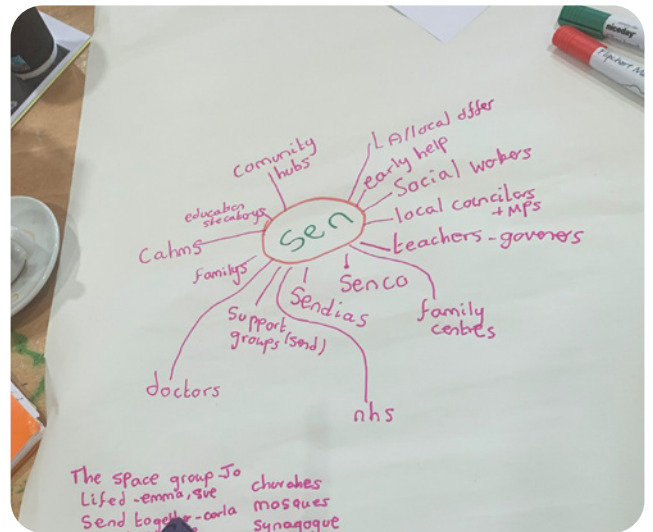


Image: Community mapping on SEND, September 2023

► **More people are working together within neighbourhood-based, resident-led networks with ambitious, successful agendas.**

**Ageing Well in Place in Hulme**

Despite significant delays associated with a two-year restructure and high staff turnover at One Manchester housing association, Aquarius Community Savers successfully sustained their partnership with Manchester School of Architecture; Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing; local GP practices and One Manchester to achieve positive outcomes for elderly tower block tenants in 2023. They were also able to share their learning with Brinnington Savers and Stockport Homes while they develop their own approach to Ageing Well in Place.

Together with CLASS, they have been able to build on the existing work at Hopton Court to catalyse a new partnership with national charity Turn2Us through their Cost of Care programme called *Meredith Matters*. This focuses on tenant-led research and advocacy into the financial impacts of the care system on tower block tenants at a



Image: Tenants meeting with One Manchester, April 2023



neighbouring block to Hopton Court. This will include a tenant-led household survey focused on a full spectrum of experiences from low-paid care workers to people in receipt of private or public social care services; to people who may be in need and not accessing care services.

*“There is a wider sense of community ownership and that extends into areas that the community hasn’t been active in previously. There’s greater collaboration between the community and One Manchester, and greater elements of collaboration between the community and Manchester Science Park. That relates to wellbeing, health, and dignity. There’s also Hopton court, who have got their own committee who are looking after themselves more than they used to. That shows a lot of progress. Success breeds success and we’ve now managed to pull in Turn 2 Us to [work with us at] Meredith Court, which is similar to Hopton court but different... After discussions at our last committee meeting, I went over to St Georges yesterday [a neighbouring estate] and had a different conversation this time. I felt well received. That’s a growth.”*

**Committee member, Aquarius Community Savers.**

Work is underway through the Ageing Well in Place in Hulme Steering Group to bring together learning across the two blocks in support of fundraising for the recommendations that are emerging including the need for an Independent Living Adviser and Community Development Worker. They will work with isolated tower block tenants across the neighbourhood to support older and vulnerable people to participate more fully in the life of the neighbourhood including within neighbourhood planning and intergenerational activity.

### **Miles Platting Community and Age-friendly Network (MPCAN)**

Miles Platting is a neighbourhood just north of Manchester city centre where a PFI-led regeneration was signed off in 2007 involving the demolition of a suite of community facilities and a significant number of social homes. The funding for all the replacement community infrastructure was lost in the 2008 crisis but the development of homes for private sale and rent went ahead leading to what has been called a ‘food desert’ and the loss of the local library and swimming baths. There has also been a net loss of 502 social homes from the area since 2000. Miles Platting Savers and CLASS worked together between 2019-2021 to bring local residents, projects and community groups together into dialogue about their priorities for the future, leading to the formation of Miles Platting Community and Age-friendly Network (MPCAN).

*“MPCAN at the beginning had a formal purpose to facilitate and promote community action. The meshing of older and newer populations, lack of facilities, swimming pool and library- there was a sense that this was a bit bleak, so we needed to cooperate.”*

**MPCAN Leader**

MPCAN worked with CLASS and URBED to produce a vision for the neighbourhood. This work included identifying plots of land throughout the neighbourhood that were outside the PFI contract, still within public ownership, and therefore which held potential as sites for future development of community facilities and services. MPCAN leaders have been working to realise different aspects of this vision ever since. In 2023, their work has encompassed the development of a wildlife corridor that can protect and improve green spaces and create connectivity and permeability for biodiversity and wildlife; planning for the community-led redevelopment of a church site that can bring in some of the investment and facilities that were never delivered under the PFI; and a campaign for more social housing. We elaborate on these aspects of their work further below.

*“I think it’s helped my mental health because it gives you things to think about and it gets you out... and we look out for each other - if someone is poorly or down, we make sure they are ok. I like to have a sense of achievement – but that we’ve achieved together. It feels good when we get these small wins, and now we are going for much bigger ones! Twenty years ago, we wouldn’t have dared, we just fought for people to get their repairs done. Now, we are aiming high. And it’s good and it feels good. And to be honest, sometimes it goes over my head, but if I don’t understand stuff I say so, and I can also look on the internet now.”*

**MPCAN Leader**

### **Arbourthorne and Woodhouse Park taking on the mantle.**

MPCAN has become a beacon for other community leaders across the Community Savers and Women of Wythenshawe networks. MPCAN leaders have been generous with their time, visiting other neighbourhoods to share what they have



Image: MPCAN sharing learning with WoW leaders



Image: Wythenshawe Community leaders at MPCAN demo, October 2023

learned and what has worked well for them; and hosting visits from Community Savers affiliates and projects as well as undergraduate and postgraduate student field trips.

In October 2023, leaders from Arbourthorne and Wythenshawe attended MPCAN’s family fun day and march & demonstration for social homes. Following on from that exposure and follow up visits from MPCAN, leaders and partner organisations in Park and Arbourthorne Ward (Sheffield) and



Woodhouse Park Ward (Wythenshawe, Manchester) are now in the process of establishing their own neighbourhood networks modelled on the MPCAN approach.

## ► Communities are making plans for their local areas, in partnership with local government and other stakeholders, which are implemented.

We have witnessed a whole range of community-led initiatives blossom across the Community Savers family throughout 2023 which we share below.



### St Cuthberts Communities Together

**Background:** MPCAN have developed a partnership with the Parochial Church Council of St Cuthberts (Church of England) to re-imagine the church site for both church and community use. This may include demolishing the church building which is very expensive to repair and would enable use of the full footprint of the site to develop the facilities that were never developed under the regeneration. Joint funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and the Diocese of Manchester has enabled MPCAN to commission Locality and Participate

Projects as project managers to take the project through to RIBA Stage 3.

**Achievements in 2023:** An extensive community consultation has been carried out, initial concept designs developed, the Bishop of Manchester has put his support behind the project, and MPCAN and PCC have just agreed to register a new CIO to manage the project called *St Cuthberts Communities Together*. This will develop a social space for the three neighbourhoods of Ancoats, Collyhurst, and Miles Platting which are all areas that have experienced or are still undergoing extensive regeneration followed by gentrification. The vision includes a worship space, an NHS joint services centre and a multi-purpose social centre with a small amount of social housing.

*“The enthusiasm, the skill set that is being brought to meetings, the funding that has been attracted to the wildlife project and now for St Cuthbert’s. We have built up now into being a serious project that people are willing to fund.”*

**MPCAN Leader**

**Next steps:** The project management team are currently registering the new CIO and developing a business plan for partnership and investment.

### Miles Platting Wildlife Corridor

**Background:** CLASS has supported Miles Platting Community and Age-friendly Network (MPCAN) to catalyse a whole portfolio of exciting and innovative partnerships and projects following their visioning work in 2021-22 together with other partners including the University of Manchester, Manchester City Council, Jigsaw Homes and Groundworks.

**Achievements in 2023:** Since March 2023, their plans for a wildlife corridor that can protect and improve their remaining



green space are beginning to be realised through an award of £40,000 from the GM Green Spaces fund.

They have also so far planted 46 trees as a first push towards replacing some of the trees that have been felled under the PFI, working with City of Trees; and managed to save 9 mature trees from being felled under the latest PFI development in 2023 on a much-loved community green called Sandal Green.

*“The Miles Platting Wildlife Corridor for people and nature will enhance identified spaces and create new habitats in the neighbourhoods of Miles Platting, Manchester. The aim is to improve biodiversity and the local ecosystem, increase interaction and connection between residents and their natural environment, mitigate impacts of climate change, and encourage physical activity between sites and along the Rochdale Canal.”*

#### **GM Environment Fund, 1 Sept 2023**

**Next steps:** Designs drawn up following community consultations are being used to implement changes for the enhancement and improvement of biodiversity for key green spaces across Miles Platting, to begin creating the wildlife corridor.



### **Social Homes for Miles Platting**

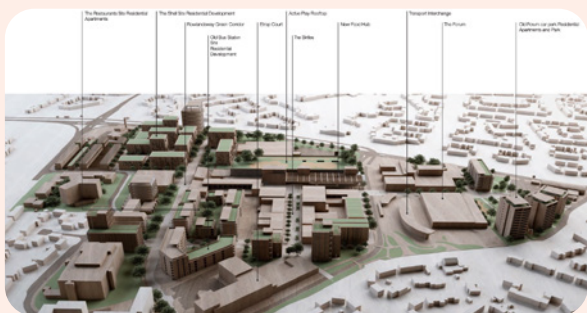
**Background:** MPCAN’s research, visioning, and action-planning work revealed that there has been a net loss of 502 social homes to demolition or the right to buy over the past 24 years.

**Achievements in 2023:** MPCAN launched a new campaign called Social Homes for Miles Platting in October, with a focus on claiming plots of public land that were earmarked for facilities and services for community benefit under the original PFI neighbourhood plan. Residents are particularly campaigning for a plot of land that was earmarked for a joint services centre and community hub under the PFI to be used to build new social homes under the city council’s new housing development initiative ‘This City’. Over 200 people attended their consultation day which was followed by a march to the formerly agreed joint services centre site and demonstration on 28 October 2023.

MPCAN leaders also launched the Social Homes for Manchester campaign on the same day working together with Women of Wythenshawe and other Community Savers affiliates.

**Next steps:** The Executive Member for Housing and Director of This City at Manchester City Council have agreed to meet residents to discuss the plot in 2024.





## Women of Wythenshawe and the Civic Centre re-development

**Background:** A major focus for Women of Wythenshawe (WoW) is achieving a higher ratio of ecologically sustainable social homes in housing developments across Wythenshawe and Manchester more widely.

**Achievements in 2023:** WoW leaders have come together with MPCAN leaders and members of GMTU to join forces and catalyse the Social Homes for Manchester coalition. Locally, they have set their sights on the redevelopment of Wythenshawe Town Centre also known as the Civic Centre. This is a once in a generation redevelopment and the council have outlined ambitious concept designs including new leisure and retail opportunities as well as up to 1,700 new homes. However, early investigations by the WoW Housing Action team revealed that only approximately 200-300 of these homes are likely to be for social rent in the context of over 15,000 households on the waiting list for social housing in the City of Manchester.

**Next steps:** Working together with a newly-formed Woodhouse Park community network (the ward where the civic centre is based), WoW leaders will be contracting an urban design team to help them develop engagement with the site's developer for a participatory approach to the development planning. The developer will be selected in May 2024 and in the meantime, WoW leaders are bringing the community together to begin a dialogue about local priorities.



Image: Climate Pageant in Miles Platting, July 2024



Image: MPCAN share learning in Wythenshawe, March 2024



Image: WoW prioritising, July 2023

# City/City-Regional outcomes

## ► Social Homes for Manchester

Social Homes for Manchester ([www.socialhomes4mcr.org.uk](http://www.socialhomes4mcr.org.uk)) is a new campaign coalition catalysed by Community Savers and CLASS in early 2023.



Image: Inner City Exchange, June 2019

Following our inner-city exchange gatherings before COVID and the work we had done to quantify the loss of social homes in Miles Platting, plus discussions across neighbourhoods in our strategic spaces during the 2020-2023 period, it was clear that addressing the housing crisis was a critical city-wide priority for Manchester affiliates. Leaders also felt that, in relation to our Theory of Change, we had reached a stage of development as an alliance where we were ready to start to join our voices together at the city scale.

According to data collated by Shelter, there were 15,268 households on the waiting list for social housing, 3,926 children in temporary accommodation, and 7,773 people recorded as homeless in the City of Manchester in 2023. Yet, between 2012 and 2022 only 506 out of 23,364 new build homes were for social rent. Together with partners, we have therefore formed a coalition of ten VCSE and activist/residents'

groups called Social Homes for Manchester which is making the following six requests of Manchester City Council:

1. At least 30% social homes included in all new developments of over 10 units to be enacted in local policy and enforced through the setting and enforcement of section 106 obligations.
2. Stronger public accountability and scrutiny for the setting and enforcement of developer obligations to build new social housing.
3. Establish a Commission on Social Housing for the City of Manchester.
4. Develop a practical strategy for the promotion of Community Led Housing.
5. Develop a practical strategy for the renovation/transfer of empty homes into homes for social rent.
6. Ensure all new developments are climate and nature friendly.



Image: Social Homes for Manchester workshop, February 2024

David Walker, Bishop of Manchester has agreed to chair the new Manchester Social Housing Commission; our asks and the Commission itself are supported by the



Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing at Manchester City Council; and we are in the process of recruiting Commissioners. The Commission will remain rooted in local campaigns and the process itself is aimed at mobilising resident/community coalitions across the city to hold the city council to account for the recommendations that are developed.

The other members of the Social Homes for Manchester coalition include Greater Manchester Tenants Union, Shelter Greater Manchester, Mustard Tree, Greater Together Manchester, Steady State Manchester, and the GM CLH Hub.



Image: Socialhomes4mcr.org

## National/ Global Action

### ► APPG on Gender & Universal Credit

On 6 February 2024, leaders from Community Savers and Women of Wythenshawe were invited by Turn 2 Us to share their experiences of the gendered impacts of the universal credit system on low income women in Manchester and Sheffield at an [APPG on Universal Credit and Gender](#).



Image: Community Savers and WoW at Westminster, February 2024

An APPG is an informal meeting of Members of Parliament (MPs) from all parties that meet to discuss specific topics with experts and stakeholders from the charity sector and academia. The aim of the meeting was for MPs to better understand the impact of Universal Credit on women. Whilst no legislation comes out of an APPG, they are an opportunity for MPs to hear from people with lived experience and understand the impact of policy on people's lives. The meeting was chaired by Debbie Abrahams, MP.

Annie from Women in Community Action Arbourthorne shared how:

*“My partner is working, and we get Universal Credit as a top up. We see dramatic changes in the amount we receive because his wage varies from month to month. This month we’ll receive over £1,000 but last month just £123. It’s impossible to plan ahead. I also recently found a job that was perfect for me, but we worked out that we would probably be around £150 worse off each month if I took it. But then on top of that, we would have to pay childcare as well which would be another £280 a month. The toll on my mental health has been absolutely shocking.”*

Sue, from Lifted Carers a partner in Women of Wythenshawe shared how:

*“Carers needs a voice. Someone to represent them. I’m a carer myself for my son and I want to speak up for myself and for other carers. The key thing for me was to share how carers are impacted by poverty greatly, particularly because of the deduction of their Carers Allowance from their Universal Credit payments, and not being able to go out to work because of their caring roles.”*

Our representatives were able to exchange learning and share the Community Savers approach with the Turn 2 Us Policy and Local Programmes teams and leaders from Ubuntu Multicultural centre and Creative Minds in Middlesborough.

## ► Homes 4 Us

The Social Homes for Manchester campaign has joined forces with the national Homes 4 Us alliance led by the New Economics Forum to share Manchester experiences, lessons and strategy with activists from across the UK.



Image: One World Together workshop, January 2024

## ► One World Together

Community Savers became founding members of One World Together in 2023 followed by a workshop bringing together leaders from Kenya, UK, and Zambia in January 2024.

One World Together is a new solidarity based fundraising movement focused on ensuring a greater volume of long-term and unrestricted funding reaches brilliant local organisations in the UK and across the world. Membership is by subscription and subscription resources are channelled directly to grassroots initiatives and movements.

We are honoured to be founding partners and proud that our involvement has grown out of our long-standing mentorship by Muungano Wa Wanavijiji and SDI Kenya.

# Leadership reflections on progress and learning

## Reflections on overall progress

*“The network has its own level of confidence, which is particularly useful in terms of how things are developing in Wythenshawe and Sheffield. Miles Platting is also a very strong group and it's good to see how Wythenshawe is developing and Sheffield has survived and restructured. In terms of the whole network, we're in a very strong position. The core staff element at CLASS has sustained itself over that time.”*

**Aquarius Community Savers Leader**

*“I think it's been great. We have a range in the network. Everything that the women are doing and achieving is amazing. What the outcomes are of what they've been fighting for. It's amazing what the people power can do and the women power, when there's more of you together.”*

**Brinnington Savers Leader**

*“I think it's fantastic how we've brought all the savers together, we're like all one together. I used to think about the groups as different groups but we are all one. And it stretches to a different range of people. It's made a network for the people and has opened their eyes about how to save.”*

**Miles Platting Leader**

*“It's been very steady – it has grown in the way we wanted it to grow from the original meetings in 2017. From the first idea. I'm very pleased with progress.”*

**Mums Mart Leader**

*“It's grown! We've got Sheffield, Wythenshawe, Hulme, the Women of Wythenshawe initiative, it's spreading! It's getting further afield and benefiting more people. That brings further afield people, and that gives you opportunities to learn from each other, and when one group may have already been through something, so you can learn from them, and having regular get togethers is really important like when we go on retreats... We work hard but we also have leisure time together and you get to know each other and even become friends. At one point I wouldn't of, but now, if I want to know something, or I'm worried about something, I can telephone Sharon or one of the others and you can talk to each other.”*

**Miles Platting Leader**

*“It's definitely grown in terms of people: I'm not sure if that's a good thing sometimes because it stretches staff resources. Maybe there isn't the closeness that there once was. As the networks get bigger you lose the personal relations - so it's harder to ask for advice and support. Sometimes it feels like a weird space rather than a personal space. It's difficult to be as open with people that you don't know as well.”*

**Arbourthorne Leader**

## How are leaders benefiting?

*“Massively! All the opportunities I’ve been offered. Teaching at University, I’ve been to London, I’ve attended training on mental health and neurodiversity. The sheer amount of opportunity – it’s changed my life. It’s had a profound impact on me. It’s changed everything!”*  
**Arbourthorne Leader**

*“It’s brought me out of my shell. I’ve met people in the community I wouldn’t have met otherwise – and people I’ve met across the country. It’s having that family relationship with everyone in the network – it feels like a family.”*  
**Miles Platting Leader**

*“I have developed relationships and grown in confidence within the Savers community. I have attended useful training: particularly the neurodiversity training which has assisted me in developing relationships with my committee members, our savers members, and the wider community. We have developed with the technical support from CLASS to run an effective and efficient Savers group.”*  
**Dandelion Savers Leader**

*“Training opportunities have helped me to feel more confident. When we join in with training with other savings groups, we also get to know other members of the network, developing relationships is important as we often have a lot in common and is supportive to share our experiences.”*  
**Miles Platting Leader**

*“Meeting with other groups and exchanges with other groups. I’ve made friends – we’re not just groups – we are women first, and we have all become good friends.”*  
**Mums Mart Leader**

*“My mental health and confidence has been much better since being involved. I’ve met new people and my new found confidence helped me apply for a job”*  
**Arbourthorne Leader**

*“With CLASS and the Savers it’s like, if there is something I need to know, or something I need to ask, I know I can ring you, and if you don’t answer me straightaway, you always get back to me.”*  
**Miles Platting Leader**

## How are groups benefiting?

*“It breeds confidence, and different things suit different people. It stifles any sense of unhealthy competitive behaviour... Each of the group’s members benefits from the wider association e.g. the latest network meeting was quite local and [one of our newest leaders] was available: That encouraged her to have that responsibility within the group - to attend meetings and represent us. That expands her sense of ownership within the group.”*  
**Aquarius Community Savers Leader**



*"It's given us ideas - things we'd like to do, like to try, people are having family fun days, so looking at how they're going about it and what's involved... It's nice introducing our members to the other savers and other communities, and let them enjoy themselves, seeing them enjoy themselves like at the Xmas party and things like that...It's about the funding as well. Without that, we wouldn't get as much funding as we do."*

**Brinnington Savers Leader**

*"We have become part of an instant Community, with a proven track record of doing good. We benefit from the technical support from CLASS (individually and as a group we could not be where we are without the amazing support with get from CLASS). So the group benefits from belonging to a well organised network and we also get advertising via social media and through being part of the Women of Wythenshawe network with new members visiting us Dandelion Community. Also the group has gained exposure to attend meetings with local councillors and senior housing representatives from the housing association."*

**Dandelion Savers Leader**

*"I think it's the way we work together and understand each other... We gain information from the different groups which helps us, and then we help different groups. Sharing ideas. We show them how to do things and they give us ideas."*

**Miles Platting Leader**

## **What are the challenges and what could we do about them?**

*"We have spoken about affiliate-to-affiliate [exchanges]: I don't see that happening as much as it might want to - not sure how this would be improved - Communications perhaps. The Community Savers website does seem to be a little bit dated - there might be some work to be done on the CLASS/Community Savers website to present opportunities for information sharing to wider interests."*

**Aquarius Community Savers Leader**

*"Working full-time makes it difficult. I always try to participate in network meetings but I find it difficult to participate in everything."*

**Brinnington Savers Leader**

*"I sometimes find that with all the travelling time, some of the meetings are too short – we could make them longer when certain things need to be achieved."*

**Dandelion Savers Leader**

*"My main challenge was about if I was good enough because I'm not educated. I'm dyslexic but being part of the groups has made me feel more confident to keep going. I can't think of any challenges being part of the network."*

**Miles Platting Leader**

*“Not enough time to do more together!”*  
Miles Platting Leader

*“Sometimes I feel that there is so much going on, I am in so many meetings, and one thing that does annoy me at times is we’ll sort out meetings and then they change for whatever reason and it’s a bit frustrating when we’ve got other meetings and other things that we’ve got to do. I need more reminders because I’ve got a lot on, including with my own health.”*

Miles Platting Leader

*“Personally, I don’t have any challenges, meetings take place when we are all available; they are at sensible times when people can still do school runs.”*

Mums Mart Leader

*“Participation in the network has been easy although sometimes my home life might stop me from participating in everything.”*

Arbourthorne Leader

*“Getting our own permanent premises and storage as we can’t progress as quickly as we would like to.”*

Arbourthorne Leader

*“We really do need to have our own space. Something we can call our own. Like Mums Mart have the church, Ellies got Apostles. It’d be nice to have our own space to do more. It’s hard when you’re always trying to hire a space.”*

Brinnington Savers Leader

## What are we learning about community action and achieving change?

Collated leader responses highlighted the following points of collective learning:

Having a **clear and collaborative vision** for the neighbourhood and then **organising around that vision** has created a strong collective resident voice on the issues that are affecting Miles Platting as a community.

*“We had a big gathering of the local community; people were able to share their thoughts and views about the St Cuthbert’s site and the plot of land behind Jigsaw. In that march, there was proper solidarity there, people were brought together to express their hopes, views, concerns and wishes. The trick is to build on it and ensure something happens. People will have felt their voice is heard and valued and taken account of. The things we are trying to do are all things that are definitely the expressed views of those people.”*

**Power to make change** is created when large numbers of residents come together around the same goals and the same vision. Also, achieving change is easier when you are part of a **wider network of change-makers**.

*“For me personally, I believe you can’t stop you’ve got to keep at them, but also as we’ve grown and got more people involved, I can see that more people mean more power. We’re not pushed aside so easily.”*

*“Community action is easier with the support of a whole network.”*

*“That change is possible. The whole community strength is demonstrated, working together, collaborating. We can achieve great things. And we’re not there yet.”*

*“The importance of bringing the groups together so we have a bigger, louder, voice. The more of us, the more voice we have, the more the decision makers have to listen.”*

*“I have learnt that meaningful change can be slow, and you need a lot of people to make an impact.”*

*“You need a lot of people to achieve community action - which is one of the benefits of the network. It’s the skills we need - we know what we want to do, and we know how it needs to be done, it’s knowing who to speak to and knowing people and knowing where to go. More people equal a bigger voice.”*

It helps to get better at **monitoring the planning system** and not assuming that what you are being told by council officers or public providers is ‘truth’ or ‘fact’ – always getting **independent guidance** and information.

*“I have also learnt a lot from some mistakes we have made e.g. don’t go to planning meetings and trust that Manchester City Council is going to work with us with the openness that we offer them. I have learnt a lot about relationships, building tolerance, and staying calm when frustrated with the bad behaviour of others.”*

The importance of **grassroots learning exchange** – learning from other communities like us who have made change and have interesting or innovative ideas for the future. We can learn from each other we don’t have to be told or taught top-down.

*“We went to Liverpool and learned about what they’ve been doing [Homebaked CLT] which is impressive. I think I’ve learned that people put an immense amount of work in to achieve those changes. It’s very much the domain of very dedicated individuals.”*

At the same time, leaders have reflected on the importance of building **connections into the right people and organisations** – knowing where to go to get the kinds of information or support for the initiative you are trying to develop (or prevent from developing).

*“Bringing together a knowledge of who to go to-that kind of intelligence is important... We know the people to go to, we’re getting a checklist of where is useful to go to.”*

*“I’ve learned about the way the council operates as well: both the politicians and the officers.”*

*“We have had people coming in from universities and students and different partner organisations who come and bring useful information, support, guidance and help.”*

Learning reflections also included that it’s important to develop these **relationships and partnerships on our own terms** according to the priorities we have set ourselves based on our expert local knowledge about our own neighbourhood.

*“Community action brings people together, it can result in real change that is actually needed. Its powerful as it comes from within our communities as we are the experts we know what will work and what is needed. It feels really good when change happens from within our communities - it can bring pride and improve wellbeing and confidence. Community action can also be really uplifting and fun e.g. the march over to the site of the joint services centre that never was.”*

*“Anything is possible. With the right support behind you, you can achieve what you want to. And just keep fighting and you will achieve it.”*

*“We have learnt that community action is still relevant and works in 2023, that there are issues that are common to our local areas that we can campaign on and seek to get our voices heard so that when decisions are made about our local area, we know that our voices at least were heard.”*

*“With Women of Wythenshawe, through technical support from CLASS, Smallwood Trust and Renaisi, we have learned about systems change and how important it is and through Community Reporter training the importance of showing our community through social media in our own words.”*

Leaders suggested that their community action has worked best when everyone is coming together with shared values focused on achieving better quality and fairer access to community facilities, housing, and services. Some leaders highlighted the **importance of focusing on** addressing the needs of households living on low incomes and experiencing **socio-economic and health inequalities**.

*“Solidarity has been important to me, like-minded people working together for a common goal has given me energy and hope”*

Having **limited time and capacity** and having the same people doing lots of community roles are commonly cited challenges. Leaders have highlighted the importance of **self-care and shared roles** which is why MPCAN has Co-Chairs who can share the load.

*“...getting other local residents involved and trying to aim for younger people because – sometimes we’re the same people doing it all, but it’s a good job its voluntary because if you are not well you don’t have to go.”*



Image: Miles Platting Savers at the Annual Retreat 2023



## Reflections on Support from CLASS and Co-Governance

### What is working well?

- “The support and reliability”
- “The amount of training and opportunities provided”
- “Kate!” [*CLASS Operations Manager who provides financial governance and accounting support*]
- It’s very important to have a member of staff on hand to keep an eye on the books and turning up to reassure savers at that level. The process is authentic and valued.”
- Ensuring groups have funding to cover their basic project costs and also more ambitious projects and partnerships.
- Practical support for running a group.
- Technical support on more complex issues like finance, design, and planning.
- Administration and financial/accounting support.

### What hasn’t been so good?

- There is a lot of focus on Manchester – sometimes Brinnington and Arbourthorne are left out on a limb.
- Last minute changes of meeting times.

### Suggestions for improvement

- Support for more networking in Stockport and Sheffield helping to create more groups in these areas.
- A staff member based in Sheffield.
- More support to access more funding.
- Proposal to increase the term limit for each leaders representation on the CLASS board from two years to three years (an additional four meetings).
- One leader shared the reflection that: “We may need, in the future, to look at a way to make sure that the people who are engaging in our processes are genuinely committed to the same goals and values...We need to have a way to prevent people getting involved who have questionable motives.”

### Reflections on Co-Governance

- “I think it’s really good the way we co-govern it and share the decision making. We feel like we are listened to and more involved. We get to make them choices... We get all the reports and everything we need. If we can’t attend a meeting, we get all the updates.”
- “I have really loved representing Savers at the trustee meetings. I have learnt a lot about all the groups that CLASS supports and how the charity is developing. The leadership team is a great way of making shared decisions.”
- “It takes time to feel confident to contribute in the trustee meetings and I have appreciated the fact that I have been involved for two years, it’s just a shame that I need to step down now when it feels like I am coming into my own. But I appreciate that others need to have the same opportunity.”
- “I feel we make decisions ... That’s the way it should be if we are all trying to achieve the same thing, it’s good we do get a say. We give our voice, and it doesn’t matter to me if you are doctors or what have you, I feel comfortable saying what I have to say. You do share everything with us. We do make the final decisions together. Even if we don’t all agree, by end of meeting we come to an agreement about what’s the best approach.
- “We share ideas and it feels very much equal.”
- “It’s working well: everyone is happy with the decisions because it is equal - we have lots of opportunity to talk about what’s going on and if we agree. Everyone’s voice is heard. I think the turnaround of people and the leadership team is all fair and fine.”

*“We work well with CLASS. We do get support from other organisations but other things we do, it’s us that’s got to sort everything out... we just muddle through. But you know that we are just local residents trying to make things better. You’ve taken time to get to know us all individually and you give us the support we need. Like me, people telling me I lack confidence. But I can do it. It was Sophie that told me that, that I’m good at what I do and its lack of confidence. I say it as it is and not everyone can cope with that, but CLASS has never had a problem with this. They take a personal approach they make sure you are ok that is all part of it as well. It’s like we are a big family – even though we might sometimes fall out with each other, we move on when it’s all said and done.”*



Image: Preparations for the IWD Walk for Women, March 2024

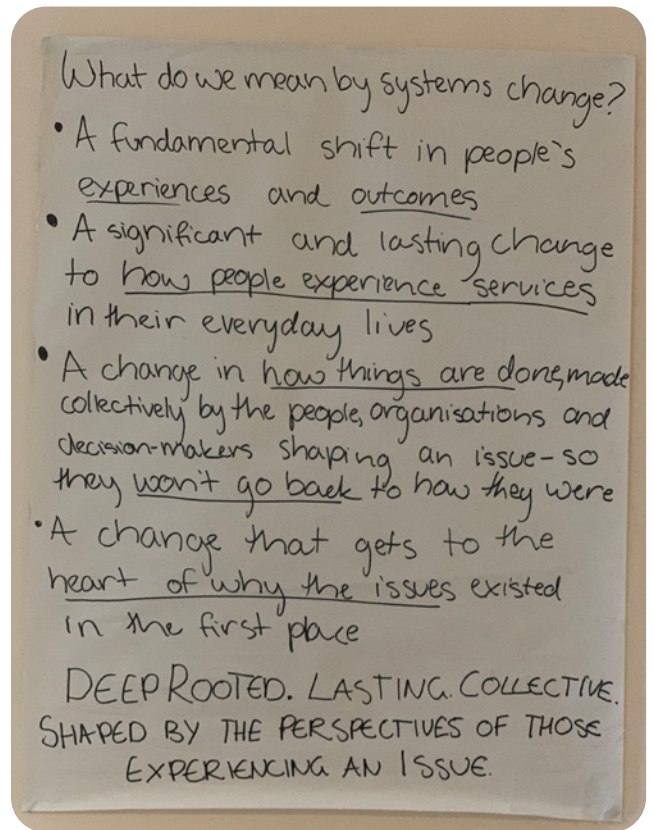


Image: Systems change analysis with Renaisi, October 2023



Image: WoW Housing Action meeting, November 2023

# Future direction

## Financial inclusion and resilience

The cost-of-living crisis and increased uptake of the savings clubs in our communities have highlighted the importance of financial inclusion support. Surveys we have carried out in Hulme have also highlighted the lack of information and support for people living on a low income about household finances, benefits entitlements, managing money, debt, and credit. We were delighted to receive a grant to develop the financial inclusion offer of the savings clubs from QBE Foundation in November 2023 and this is enabling us to take these plans forward in 2024. The funding has increased the time we can invest in finance and accounting support to the groups and through a new partnership with Talk About Money CIC.

## Women's leadership

We will continue to co-create and deliver our skills-based training programme. Together with the self-esteem and agency that grows out of participation in Community Savers, and the voluntary experience gained through our community action, this is increasing personal development and employability among leaders.

CLASS will continue to develop partnerships and opportunities for leaders to build confidence and hone their advocacy skills through teaching and public speaking engagements. This is assisted by continuous partnership with key departments at the University of Sheffield; The University of Manchester; and Manchester Metropolitan University. We will focus on developing and strengthening our partnerships with a growing network of local and national VCSE organisations and alliances. These partnerships allow for joined up advocacy

on the most critical issues that are holding women and marginalised neighbourhoods in poverty.

## Wellbeing and community cohesion

We are all proud of the mental health and community building impacts we have been able to evidence from our community action in 2023. Members across our nine neighbourhoods (including WoW) are feeling more positive about life, reporting improved mental health and an increased sense of connectedness and collective agency. Through WoW in particular, we are proud of bringing together women from diverse backgrounds to build relationships around what they hold in common rather than what sets them apart.

*"It opens your mind about different cultures. There's lots of things that I didn't know...It just opens your mind to what their life was like, when in their country and that. So, it's made me sort of look with a different mindset as well. I know, the indigenous white woman has got it bad. You know, the way the indigenous white woman is treated has got it bad. But the migrants have got it bad as well... so, everyone needs to be looked after."*

**WoW Leader**

At a time of division and economic crisis when competition for resources is regularly manipulated and misrepresented in politics and the media, this focus of our work is ever more critical, and this will continue to be a key priority going forwards. Community-building is at the heart of the Community Savers methodology: bringing people together behind shared values and collective



Image: WoW at IWD Walk for Women, March 2024



visions for the places they hold in common – places where we live, go to school, work, bring up children, and grow old.

## Stronger neighbourhood associations

Confident, skilled, and purposeful leaders create stronger and more sustainable neighbourhood associations. The kinds of associations which are able to network together and federate upwards for a stronger collective voice on the issues affecting their communities. We are excited to see (and looking forward to supporting) the development of two new neighbourhood networks in 2024 in Arbourthorne, Sheffield and Woodhouse Park, Wythenshawe. We are anticipating a third collective growing out of Ageing Well in Place in Hulme and a long standing partnership with Hulme Tenants Union, with discussions already underway about an Aquarius and St Georges Development Trust.

## Coalitions for urban justice

A key point of learning and an imperative from our 2022 impact report was local coalition building. We have responded by strengthening existing neighbourhood coalitions like MPCAN and Ageing Well

in Place in Hulme; while supporting the development of a whole new portfolio of women-led community action on domestic abuse, housing, and the crisis in SEND provision through the Women of Wythenshawe initiative.

It has been exciting to watch MPCAN and WoW leaders join forces to catalyse the Social Homes for Manchester coalition. It's also refreshing to see a city-wide campaign driven by grassroots activism from some of the most multiply-disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Manchester. The SH4M coalition is committed to sustaining this bottom-up foundation through strong direct representation by neighbourhood activists and supporting the promulgation of local campaigns for developer obligations to build social homes within local developments across the city. This will be a core focus for a number of Community Savers affiliates and for WoW Housing Action in the year ahead, and for the CLASS staff team in support.

## Balancing growth with quality & impact

Recent leadership reflections and some of the concerns raised during the evaluation highlight the challenges of broadening our reach while we also seek to deepen impact and sustain our quality of support within existing neighbourhoods. This is a central focus for the 2024 Community Savers Annual Retreat and our initial proposals developed in conversation with the Leadership Team, and the CLASS staff team and trustees are outlined below.

## Developing the CLASS staff team

We have identified a need for a team of Community Facilitators that can be managed by a Movement Coordinator who would also be the main liaison for network-wide leadership development, learning, and coordination. The Community Facilitator role has the potential to create employment for community activists across



our neighbourhoods of operation. Posts would not be ring-fenced for this purpose and would be open recruitments based on appropriate knowledge, skills, and experience. However, we will develop these opportunities with an eye to 'positive action' recruitment processes as we have for our Meredith Matters and Women of Wythenshawe appointments. This team would sit alongside our projects and core operational staff.

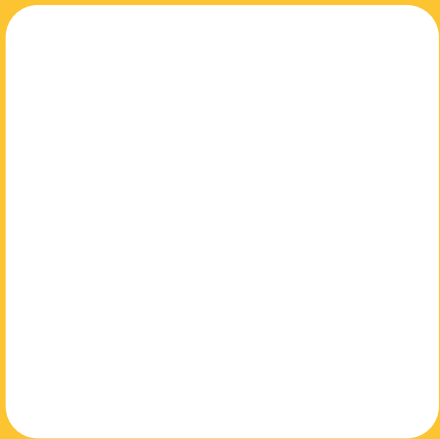
As ever, this will require significant financial investment from partner trusts and foundations, and we are delighted to have welcomed Gemma Harwood to the CLASS staff team in 2023 who is working with us one day per week as our Fundraising and Strategic Development Associate.

### **Supporting network development in Stockport and Sheffield**

Within our new structure, we would ideally have a Community Facilitator role in each of these municipalities. We will look to identify staff who are locally embedded, know their contexts well, and have the right orientation to work effectively in partnership with the existing Community Savers leadership in these areas to co-create exciting new coalitions for change.

### **Building our profile and improving our communications**

To assist us in this strategic development, we are delighted to have been awarded a grant from The Clothworkers Foundation. This will assist us to transform our public profile through a new reinvigorated website with an emphasis on clear and direct presentation of our alliance, how it works, and the amazing impacts that Community Savers are achieving across Manchester, Sheffield, and Stockport. Together with the significant diversification of communications channels that we have achieved in the latter half of 2023 and early 2024, we hope this will help to raise Community Savers profile among new communities, partners, and funders



**Community Savers and CLASS would like to thank all our partners, supporters and funders and we look forward to working with you in 2023 and beyond!**

