

The Melting Pot Evaluation



Social Research



Service Design & Innovation



Strategy & Collaboration



Evaluation Support



Social Impact Measurement

August 2023



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1: Introduction

This report presents the findings of a review of The Melting Pot's activities and social impact.

The Melting Pot

The Melting Pot was established in 2007 in Edinburgh, to provide people and organisations working towards social change with flexible, safe and creative solutions for work. The Melting Pot was one of the first coworking spaces in the world, and is Scotland's centre for social innovation.

In 2021, The Melting Pot opened in its new location on Calton Road, where it continues to provide resources for the social innovation sector. It is a place where people come together to meet, work, learn from each other, and collectively contribute to affecting social change. By stimulating ideas and supporting individuals and organisations, The Melting Pot aims to nurture a vibrant, creative, resilient and effective social innovation community.

Strategy 2023

Research¹ carried out by The Melting Pot in 2021 outlined what people needed from their workspace following the COVID-19 pandemic, and made some predictions about the future. The Melting Pot has used these insights to inform their new strategy as they look ahead to 2028. They will continue to provide innovative and fit-for-purpose solutions in the context of the 'new normal' work environment, whilst accelerating and amplifying their members' success.

Taking into account their strengths and mission as an organisation, The Melting Pot's ambition is that by 2028, they will become the flagship centre for Social Innovation in Scotland, supporting a vibrant, creative and resilient global social innovation community. This is the ambition from which all objectives and priorities will grow. The Melting Pot aims to empower social innovation and sustainable business growth through the three strands of the business: Coworking, Consultancy and

Good Ideas², equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills and networks to create positive change for people and the planet.

This report was commissioned to understand and evidence the impact of The Melting Pot on the individuals and organisations who are part of the social innovation community, and to inform The Melting Pot's strategy as it establishes itself in its new building.

The Melting Pot undertook a social impact report in 2018. Given the multitude of changes that have occurred internally and in the wider world, the board recognised a need to update their understanding of what their members are achieving and what they need. It is vital to The Melting Pot's core values that they are providing relevant, current and forward-looking support and resources for people and organisations working towards the future of the social innovation sector. The aim of this report is to enable them to do that with greater insight and understanding.

Research Methodology

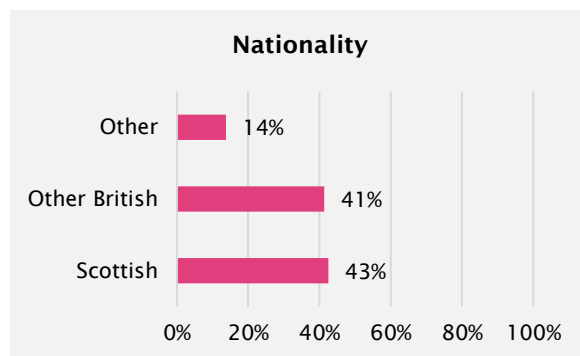
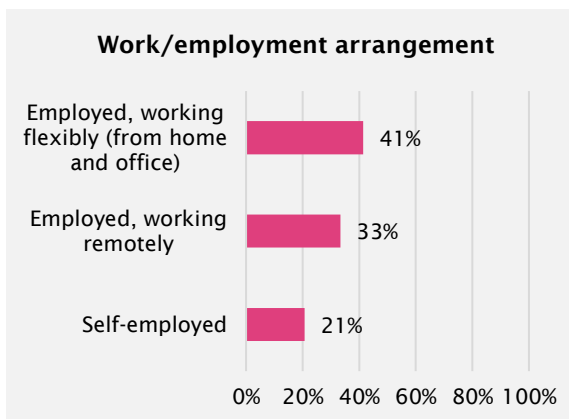
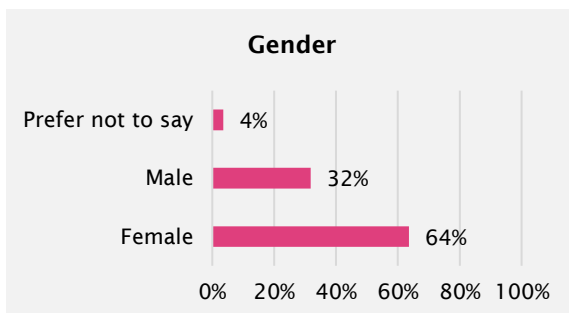
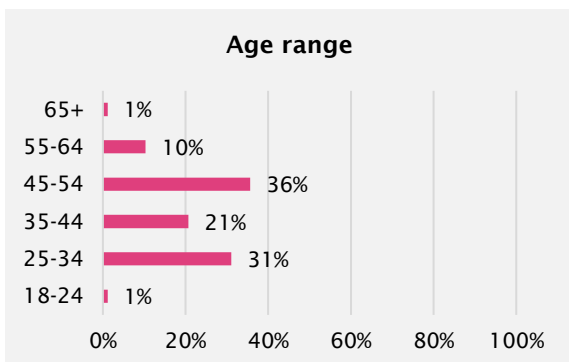
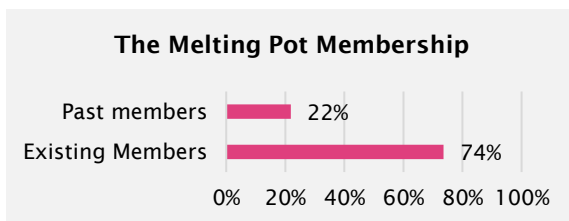
This evaluation was undertaken using a mixed-methods approach, consisting of:

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- Review of The Melting Pot's existing research and evidence
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- Formulation of Logic Model outlining The Melting Pot's activities, resources and outcomes
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- A survey of existing and past members of The Melting Pot, with 87 respondents
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- Semi-structured interviews with 11 existing members
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Characteristics of the survey respondents can be seen below:

¹ [Future of the Office - Report by The Melting Pot - The Melting Pot \(themeltingpotedinburgh.org.uk\)](https://www.themeltingpotedinburgh.org.uk/future-of-the-office-report)

² [Good Ideas - The Melting Pot \(themeltingpotedinburgh.org.uk\)](https://www.themeltingpotedinburgh.org.uk/good-ideas)



Interviewees were invited to participate by The Melting Pot board members, and interviews were conducted over video conferencing. The members selected represented the broad range of individuals who use the space. They consisted of:

- Freelancers, self-employed people and business owners
- Remote or flexible workers from small and large organisations
- Senior staff members and CEOs
- New and long-standing The Melting Pot members
- Range of ages, genders and nationalities

2: Theory of Change

This section provides the Theory of Change developed for The Melting Pot

The Issue

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of coworking spaces was increasingly popular. With almost everyone working from home during the pandemic, and some relocating around the UK or internationally, the changes that were already taking place within the world of work were accelerated. Typically associated with freelancers and self-employed people, coworking spaces now need to accommodate increased demand as businesses have reduced their office capacity and embedded flexible work arrangements into their operations as standard. As well as providing somewhere for their employees to work, some organisations need professional spaces where they can host meetings and events.

People's attitudes and priorities in relation to their work have also shifted. There is an increased emphasis on wellbeing, flexibility, and establishing professional boundaries for a healthy work-life balance. Despite 'WFH' being a widely familiar concept if not also a feature of people's professional lives, 'home' is not always a convenient or practical place to work. Domestic distractions make it difficult to fully enter a professional headspace, limiting people's productivity and making it harder for individuals to build their professional identity. Equally important is the ability to 'switch off' at the end of the day and fully engage with life outside of work. Achieving this balance is difficult when work and home share one physical space, and work devices are never fully out of reach.

For people who work remotely, the social aspect of the office environment is lost. Without informal social interactions, remote workers lose the opportunity to build relationships, bounce ideas off people, and learn from each other. Relationships formed in the workplace have known benefits for the individual, but these social interactions also benefit the social innovation

sector as a whole, as people are able to work more collaboratively, imaginatively and efficiently.

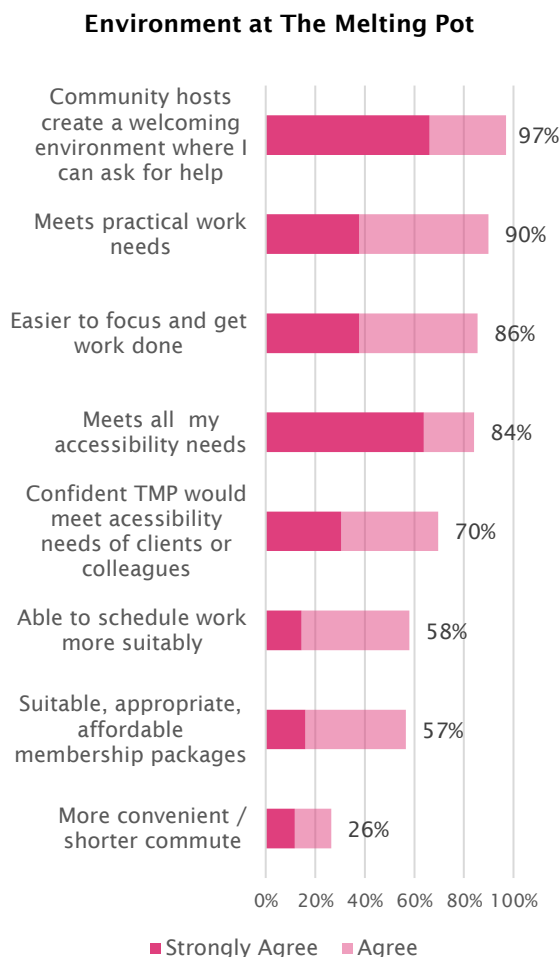
Resources	Outputs		Outcomes -- Impact		National Policies
	Activities	Stakeholders	Short and Medium Term	Long Term	
<p>The Melting Pot Building</p> <p>Co-working spaces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting rooms - Individual desks - 'Nooks' - Board rooms - Neurodiverse-friendly zones - Break-out rooms - Quiet zones - Informal zones <p>Community Hosts</p>	<p>Venue hire</p> <p>Consultancy</p> <p>Good Ideas programme</p> <p>Social events</p> <p>Professional / networking events</p>	<p>Individual Social innovators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - freelancers - small business owners - Self-employed <p>Third sector organisations and teams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Medium (~50 people, local/national) - Large (remote workers, hot desks (50+ people, national and international) <p>Campaigning bodies</p> <p>Third sector consultants</p> <p>Scottish and local government civil servants and decision-makers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have flexible access to an affordable and high-quality working environment • Make invaluable professional and social connections with like-minded people • Build business confidence through training and mentorship • Have more opportunities to collaborate and innovate with others • Have improved work-life balance and wellbeing • Can increase their ability to influence social innovation in Scotland by contributing with others to evidence 'what works' <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have improved working relationships within the team • Operate in a more time and cost efficient way • Are able to provide more inclusive, accessible and flexible work arrangements for their employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain a better understanding of the third sector, social innovation, and the challenges that face the sector • Have improved decision-making processes, informed by socially innovative approach • Have improved relationships and stronger connections with partner organisations in the third sector 	<p>System change: How we use spaces, what we value in the sector, and the professional landscape of Edinburgh (and other cities) is reflective of what works best for social innovators.</p> <p>The Melting Pot is Scotland's centre for social innovation: The Melting Pot remains an ambitious, creative, and dynamic resource for people who are contributing to social innovation.</p> <p>"A world which has a vibrant, creative, resilient and effective social innovation community." - TMP vision</p>	<p>Wellbeing Economy</p> <p>Social Enterprise Strategy</p> <p>National Performance Framework</p> <p>Community Wealth Building</p> <p>Just Transitions into Net Zero</p> <p>Equalities Strategy</p>

3: Outcomes and Evidence

This section provides the evidence of the outcomes achieved by members of The Melting Pot, and discusses the impact of these outcomes.

A flexible and affordable working environment

The Melting Pot members were asked about the environment of the coworking space, and how The Melting Pot met their professional and personal needs.



Their responses show that almost all (97%) members felt welcomed and able to ask for help from the community hosts. The vast majority of members also found that their

practical and accessibility needs were well catered-for at The Melting Pot, and that they were more productive as a result of working there. For over half The Melting Pot members, their membership package was suitable for them financially, and allowed them to work to a more convenient schedule.

Interview discussions corroborated these responses. The role of the community hosts in creating the friendly and welcoming atmosphere was a prominent theme in interviews. Hosts were recognised as friendly faces and they knew members individually. This enabled them to make thoughtful connections between people, and recognise what members needed day to day, for instance identifying when to leave them to their work and when to introduce them to new people. Interviewees reflected that this was something that set The Melting Pot apart from other coworking spaces.

"It's about effective hosting, and I would say there's a nice friendly atmosphere there, which doesn't happen by accident."

"When something needs fixing, they get it fixed but they are also subtly, very naturally the social glue within the space. They know the different people, they read the room very well."

For the most part, The Melting Pot members used the space as an alternative to working from home, incentivised by the monotony of lockdowns to find a different environment. Having a pleasant environment that fulfilled their work needs was highly important to members, and contributed to increased productivity and focus:

"I get things done better in that space than elsewhere. My flat doesn't even have room for a good desk, it has a

desk that's not right for me, a chair that's not right for me so even from a purely ergonomic, logistical perspective, I'm already in a better place at The Melting Pot."

"It's become my safe space where I know what I'm going to get."

"I don't have an office space at home, so it was really necessary for me – somewhere I could just go and get my head down and work where I wasn't going to be interrupted by kids and all that kind of stuff."

"It allows me to be creative, it's a different space for me to go and I think that helps creativity and productivity. I definitely feel more productive and more creative and I'm sure it's because of the environment and some of the things they've put in there to encourage that."

Some members use The Melting Pot as their 'virtual office' for necessities such as receiving post or registering as a charity. This includes members whose organisations work entirely remotely, freelancers, and individuals whose employers have offices in Edinburgh or elsewhere but benefit from The Melting Pot membership nonetheless. Having The Melting Pot provides members with a more professional environment to conduct client, recruitment or board meetings, connect with their colleagues, and work in a space that reflects their values and ambitions.

"It's just got everything you need to have a professional business, and I use the address as my address."

"It's our virtual office, all our mail gets sent there. And it's a practical value for the organisation. We have all of our board meetings there, there's lots of activity that happens in that space."

"We use it as a place where we can come together and see each other sometimes, but not necessarily all the time. It allows us a space to just touch base for the three of us."

"I had a meeting yesterday and it was really nice to be able to say, come here [to The Melting Pot], instead of saying 'Come to a café,' – we always had to find somewhere to meet which made it harder, whereas this is actually where we work, this feels like our office."

"It feels contemporary rather than tired. Our previous place felt a little bit 'local authority' corporate, whereas this feels something a little bit different, which we really welcome."

"Location is bang-on, it's right next to Waverley station. It has enabled us to invite colleagues up from London who can step off a train straight into a meeting with us."

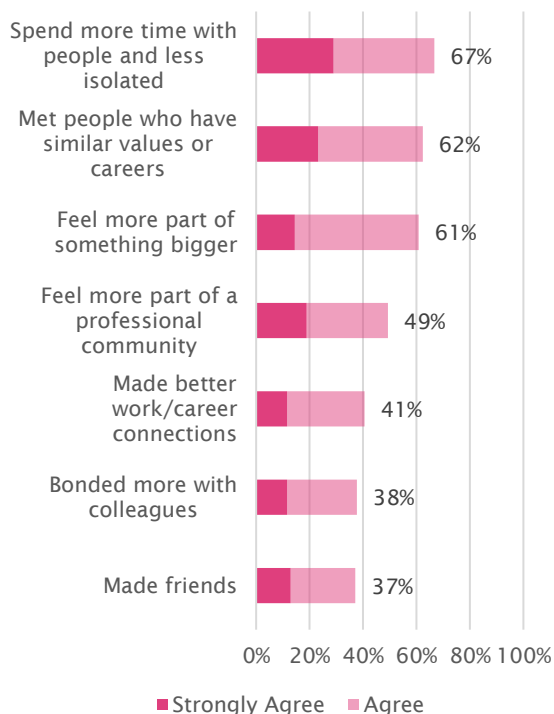
Comments gathered from interviews and from the survey indicate a number of practical features that were important to members or that they felt were missing from the space. Themes that were largely consistent include:

-
- Increasing the number of nooks and private spaces to make calls
-
- The new location does not lend itself as naturally to social interaction
-
- Physical accessibility is limited
-
- The cost of packages (e.g. night owl pass) can be prohibitive to people whose organisations don't cover the cost for them
-

Make invaluable professional and social connections

The chart below displays the difference The Melting Pot membership makes to people's social and professional networks.

Professional and social connections



“Being part of The Melting Pot network is invaluable. I’ve never before been in a space where I’ve met so many people with similar values working across such a range of interesting areas.”

The sense of community that The Melting Pot members feel is apparent in these responses. Between 60-70% of members indicated that they felt part of something bigger, had met people with similar values to themselves, and were less isolated as a result of being a Melting Pot member. A significant proportion of members also made friends, bonded with colleagues, and enhanced their professional networks through The Melting Pot.

Interviews with The Melting Pot members revealed some of the features of the place that facilitated people expanding their social and professional networks. Members felt that the set-up of The Melting Pot, with the communal kitchen, open ‘chatty’ spaces to work (as distinct from the quiet rooms), and the social events they hosted all contributed to the sense of ease with which members felt able to introduce themselves to people and build on the incidental interactions that don’t happen when working from home. This was a strong incentive for many members to join The Melting Pot initially, and interviewees indicated

that it was an aspect The Melting Pot successfully delivered on.

“It was the one where people said hello.”

“Being self-employed, you’re already craving some of those interactions anyway, because you don’t have them.”

“I do miss, as a freelancer, the actual strategizing with colleagues, but the basic human interaction with people, it’s something I’ve realised I really valued. And The Melting Pot has provided that.”

“It’s nice to actually meet people and have lunch with someone, it does make it feel more like an office environment that I really feel like we need at the moment.”

“For me, it’s a place to meet people. Because our work, because it’s remote, does feel quite isolating sometimes.”

The Melting Pot supports people who work in similar fields, which for some members acted as a foundation from which they could form more meaningful connections and develop lasting relationships. They instantly had something in common with other members, and this led to a sense of community.

“I would emphasise the aspect of feeling like I’m part of something, I have a place to go, it’s bigger than me.”

“I’ve been with The Melting Pot for a really long time and I know a lot of people there, so I’ve formed a lot of connections.”

Being part of a professional community at The Melting Pot provided people with an alternative to networking events, which are often daunting and ineffective. Through working at The Melting Pot and attending social events, members were able to discuss work and increase their professional network in more informal contexts. This gave people confidence, led to more fulfilling relationships, and provided members with the opportunity to have informal but work-related conversations such as might take place between colleagues. Interviewees noted that these conversations were different to the conversations they had

with people they knew purely socially, and were something that freelancers and people who worked independently missed.

"It's like having colleagues but you're not actually involved in each other's work, so it's really nice."

"You have your typical networking events where you go there and chat and meet people and talk to people and stuff and have drinks, and I used to do that a lot. But that can be really time consuming. So you get to a point where you're busy with actual work. But at [The Melting Pot] the working spaces are kind of a way you can network whilst working."

"There's a feeling of community and that you're not alone like there's other people busy doing their thing."

Members reflected that being part of The Melting Pot helped them to feel less isolated in their work life but also in Edinburgh as a city. Some had joined The Melting Pot with the social aspect in mind, while others joined for work-related reasons, and continued to return after their work needs changed because they felt the ongoing social benefit of being part of The Melting Pot community.

"It made an immediate difference to me socially, especially when I attended the events."

"Even though I was originally from Edinburgh, coming back in your forties... I have made genuine friends through The Melting Pot, and that was actually something I was looking for."

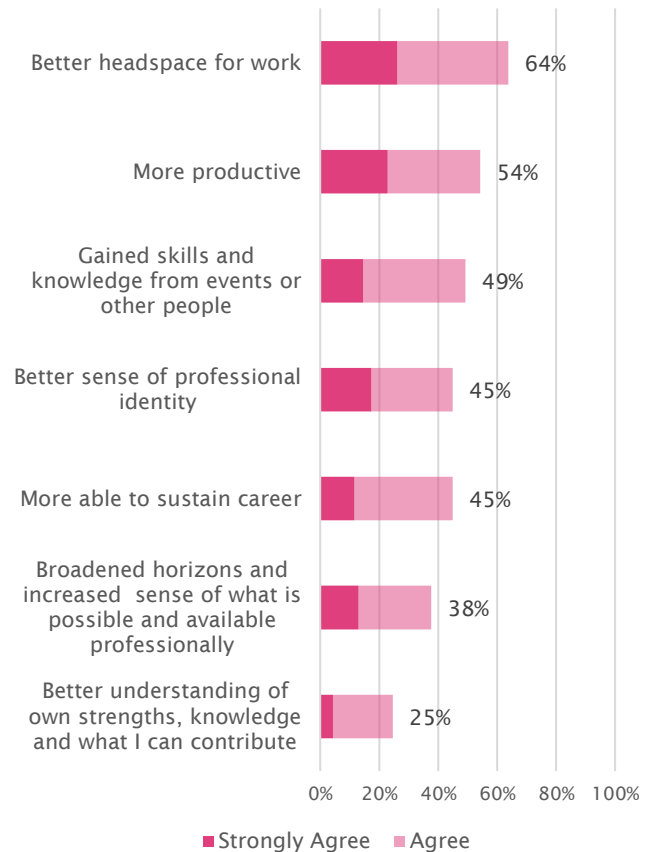
"The reason I started getting involved with The Melting Pot is that it was like-minded people doing similar stuff. So it was a good opportunity to meet other people who were working in similar industries, and had aligned values."

"I've just met so many like-minded individuals, I honestly feel like I've restored my faith in humanity - there are so many people working on such beautiful things for the world."

Build business confidence through training and mentorship

The Melting Pot members indicated that their skills and business confidence had increased across a range of areas, as shown in the chart below.

Increased skills and business confidence



"I am developing a research proposal from outside the academic arena. This could have been a lonely experience, but The Melting Pot has provided legitimacy and community."

"The Melting Pot has enabled me to work remotely without feeling isolated. It has also given me confidence and connections to take up some freelance work as the next step in my career."

Most significantly, members found that being at The Melting Pot put them in a better headspace for work (64%), with the majority indicating that they were more productive as a result. Members also indicated that their skills, ambitions, and sense of what was possible for

them had increased since joining The Melting Pot. A significant proportion reported that these factors aligned with their career sustainability, and they felt more confident about the future of their career thanks to working at The Melting Pot.

In interviews, The Melting Pot members discussed a range of factors that contributed to them gaining a greater sense of business confidence. Interviewees reflected that working alongside people who were not part of their organisation but had similar interests and ambitions helped them to maintain a broad perspective on the third sector and what was happening in other, similar fields. Comments demonstrate mutual learning and support between members:

"There have been times when I've also assisted others that are in The Melting Pot – just pointing them in the direction of resources or stuff."

"Because we're part of The Melting Pot, there's a bit of a feeling of yeah, Members help each other out, which doesn't happen in other spaces."

Information sharing occurred organically through conversations with other members, and through events hosted at The Melting Pot such as Show and Tell, where members share their work with audiences who don't necessarily work in their field but nonetheless have an interest in their projects.

"Just seeing the various things that other people are doing, and the issues that other people are engaging with, it's helped me understand some of the things that are happening in Scotland and what people are doing, some of the challenges that are being addressed in this sector, that I wouldn't have necessarily known about or understood. So I've learnt a lot of stuff as well."

"[There was a] presentation recently which I'm not sure linked directly to work for me but it's incredibly interesting for my field."

The Melting Pot members also described how their organisation as a whole benefitted from the space in this respect. In particular, organisations with no other base found that working alongside colleagues significantly

improved recruitment and induction processes for all team members, and enabled greater team bonding.

"I come in predominantly to meet other members of my team, because we're all remote workers. So for me, it's about developing those relationships within my team."

"We've just employed a new member, and inducting and bringing on a new team member when everybody's working remotely is inherently difficult for everybody, especially for that new person to become integrated. I'm really welcoming the fact that we have an office space where we can be together so she can ask anything throughout the course of the day instantly, rather than it all having to be pre-planned and booked in on Teams."

"Having the actual space to recruit makes a difference. Otherwise we would've had to hire out somewhere else."

Have more opportunities to collaborate and innovate with others

The Melting Pot members were asked about the impact that their membership had on their capacity to collaborate and develop new ideas and projects, as individuals or as organisations. Their responses are shown in the chart below.

Opportunities for collaboration and innovation



"I love to feel like I'm in a community of deeply thoughtful individuals who are all doing good stuff, it is super refreshing."

The Melting Pot members indicate that the majority (52%) feel inspired while working in the space, thanks to being surrounded by other people contributing to social innovation. Their sense of familiarity with the sector and their confidence to try new things and start new projects was demonstrably increased as a result of working at The Melting Pot. A quarter of members reported that they had collaborated with other organisations who were also The Melting Pot members.

Comments from interviews reiterate the above findings, with some interviewees giving examples of specific collaborations that had arisen from working at The Melting Pot. These individuals found that The Melting Pot provided the opportunity to discuss other people's work in more depth, through casual conversations, which led to a deeper understanding of how they could work together or support each other.

"I can think of three or four incidents where just a passing conversation ended up in a collaboration or a partnership - partnership working."

"The people who work at The Melting Pot are quite good at connecting the people that work there, which I've found very valuable - especially recently because I've been getting into the nitty gritty of my work and I understand my organisation better. Through the people I've been meeting, I've then met other people who are working on different things that are related, and within the space we've all sort of understood that actually quite a lot of our work in different areas overlaps. And collaborations and conversations have just started through lunchtime, or overhearing someone talk about something that we're working on, too."

This was characterised as different to typical networking processes, as the interactions at The Melting Pot led to people supporting each other in areas they weren't necessarily seeking support in, but benefitted from anyway. The social context of The Melting Pot also helped to frame these interactions as less daunting than other networking events.

"It's nice to network with people you're not necessarily working with, because you can just see what you can learn from them, and I guess what they can learn from you."

"There are lots of relationships that are just sort of slightly accidental."

"Nothing feels like the pressure of networking or the pressure to do anything. It's just a group of people who are working here and having lunch together, and because you're seeing each other all the time, it doesn't feel so daunting to start up a conversation. It feels very natural."

Some interviewees reflected that the structure of their work meant that collaborative working wasn't something they were seeking. However, they suggested that they would turn to the The Melting Pot community for support in future projects, or had found themselves working alongside people at The Melting Pot with whom they had collaborated in the past. Working at The Melting Pot also meant that people met individuals from organisations

they had heard of, but only knew in a formal capacity. Putting faces to names in this regard helped people to establish connections and gain confidence within their field.

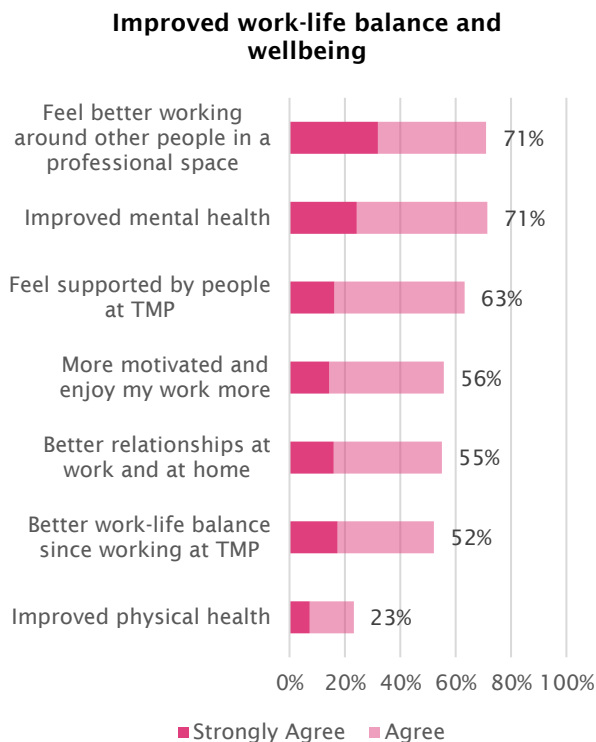
"I do a lot of networking online, on LinkedIn and Facebook and all these other ones, but sometimes you feel like it's not 100% fulfilling. [...] I think it can get really lonely if you're just relying 100% on the internet."

"We've sort of heard of them in the background, and now it's like, 'Oh you're actually that person from that organisation.'"

In this respect, being part of The Melting Pot community encouraged individuals and organisations to maintain and develop an innovative approach, and to learn from and be inspired by other organisations working in similar areas, even if they were not working in partnership on a collaborative project.

Have improved work-life balance and wellbeing

Responses from The Melting Pot members show that membership has a significant impact on their wellbeing across a number of factors, as displayed in the chart below.



"Working at The Melting Pot has massively improved my mental health. Having a break between work and home, and having the opportunity to meet other people during the working day, make a huge difference to how I feel overall."

Respondents noted a general improvement in their mental health, and associated the professional and social environment of The Melting Pot with their improved mood (71%). A significant majority also saw improvements in their personal lives, resulting from better work-life balance and improved relationships. For almost a quarter of respondents, working at The Melting Pot had a positive impact on their physical health.

The positive impact that The Melting Pot had on members' mental wellbeing was a prominent theme in interviews, too. All interviewees reflected that their general mood had lifted as a result of working at The Melting Pot. This was mostly attributed to getting out of the house, having a light and comfortable environment to work in, and having people to talk to and interact with. Especially for members who joined during or shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, the social aspect of

The Melting Pot was a significant factor in lifting their mood.

"I'm in a much better headspace about work now, and arguably a better one. [I had] this deep-seated fatigue in working from home, I wasn't meeting people. I was definitely socially isolated."

"It's a chance to go out and see people, and chat and be part of the community, rather than just me and the dog and the cat."

"Being at The Melting Pot has been transformative for my mental health. As someone who lives by themselves, it's made a massive difference being able to chat to people."

The rhythm and structure that The Melting Pot membership provided to people's days and weeks was another significant theme that arose from discussions about wellbeing. People noted that having somewhere else to work helped them to switch between work and home life more easily, putting them in a better headspace to work, and providing them with the mental space to engage with home life at the end of the day. Most found that this had a positive impact on their relationships with those they lived with, and contributed to improved mental wellbeing overall.

"It's given me rhythm to my days."

"The hard close at 5:30 is good for me as I'm a workaholic and need someone to turn off the lights on work time."

"You need to be self-motivated and structured and have a really good routine. And I was not disciplined, I didn't have those good habits. [...] And now I have a daily commute, I have a better rhythm and I'll stop work earlier is what I've noticed."

"When you're working from home, the only reason to stop working is that my husband would come home and he'd be exhausted from working at his workplace, and if I'm still working that actually has created some tension between us in the past, so it's great to avoid that."

"Being at home, when there's a childcare issue, it makes it really hard to create a boundary between your

working life and your family life. So going into an office allows you to create those boundaries, to set them really clearly and have some choice and control over that."

Interviews also revealed that members' self-esteem increased as a result of working at The Melting Pot. They mentioned that they had a renewed sense of enjoyment in their work and were more motivated in general, which led to feeling more fulfilled. Some described this through a sense of pride in themselves and their work, and others noted the difference between how they felt in the past compared to now. For interviewees who were facing specific mental health problems such as anxiety or loneliness, The Melting Pot gave them the resources to overcome this.

"I feel kind of proud to be a member of The Melting Pot, and I suppose it's part of my identity here in Edinburgh."

"By the time I got to The Melting Pot after the pandemic, I was feeling a bit - I don't know what the word is but - almost a bit desperate that I was just at work for so long by myself."

"I experienced a lot of social anxiety over lockdown and just working from home all the time. I knew when I changed roles, part of it was: 'Hey, I really need to get out of here again.'"

"It's made me kind of enjoy my job again."

Reflecting on how working at The Melting Pot makes this difference, interviewees generally commented that in addition to providing a space to socialise and interact with other people, which was vital, The Melting Pot is set up to promote positive work habits that are easy to let slip when working from home.

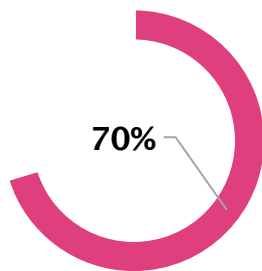
"There are things people don't think of that much like natural sunlight, and the joy, the effect that has on your body. I love that I have a really beautiful commute to The Melting Pot. [...] I can't pick out all the pieces, but there's a lot - it's more like a constellation or a mosaic effect of having all those little pieces in place. And I think the people who run The Melting Pot understand that."

"It gives us a choice, which is really healthy. It allows people to make decisions that work for them."

Can increase their ability to positively influence social innovation in Scotland by contributing with others to evidence 'what works'

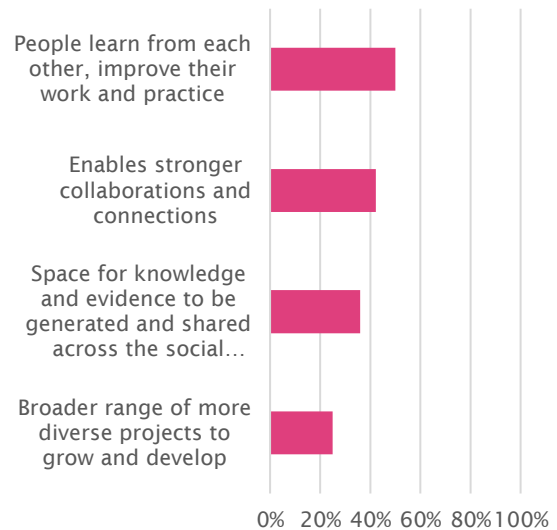
Members were asked about how working at The Melting Pot impacted their overall ability to contribute to social innovation in Scotland. Almost three-quarters of respondents indicated that The Melting Pot had a positive impact in this regard.

Able to work more effectively in social innovation



This was apparent over a number of factors, most significantly that The Melting Pot provided space for members to learn from each other to improve their work and practice (50%). A quarter of members reported that The Melting Pot resulted in a broader and more diverse range of projects developing within the social innovation sector.

The Melting Pot's influence on ability to work effectively in social innovation



"From a social innovation point of view, Edinburgh and I guess Scotland would be a poorer place without The Melting Pot."

Interviewees reflected on how The Melting Pot fitted within and contributed to effective social innovation in Scotland. It was apparent from discussions that The Melting Pot brought people together who were similar in their work and their values, and in this way set itself apart from other coworking spaces that catered to different industries or demographics.

"The Melting Pot is a container for a particular type of person. And if that wasn't there, there would be less of an impact because those people just wouldn't be getting together."

Bringing people together in this way helps to integrate new organisation and new individuals into the third sector:

"It's been really, really helpful for me to have some sort of place where there are people who are doing things that I'm interested in, absolutely. Certainly, when I moved into working in the third sector, it was invaluable."

This is complemented by the tailored support that The Melting Pot provides to organisations, both as start-ups and as they grow. Comments from members indicate that without this support, they would have struggled to make the progress that they have made.

"It supports organisations in different ways. It supports start-ups, and then as they grow and mature, it supports them in a different way."

"It was such a crazy trajectory - I wouldn't have thought I'd be doing this a year ago."

"I would say this was a significant factor in the start-up of the organisation."

It was clear from interviews that The Melting Pot members were more informed about what was going on in relation to social innovation in Scotland, and more inspired in their own work and through hearing about others', thanks to the environment that The Melting Pot provided.

"Because I don't work with any organisation in Scotland at all, it's kind of my grounding, it's a place for connecting with what's happening in Scotland."

"You get inspired just meeting new people and getting to hear different people's stories."

"Having the space to make connections outside of your specific area of focus and expertise opens up new ideas and possibilities. In previous office environments, I've worked alongside other organisations but all broadly working in the same area. Here, the diversity of experience and knowledge is immense and hugely valuable. Recently, I was talking to another member about AI and its implications for the charity sector - an area I know nothing about and that seems pretty scary, but through conversations like this has started to make (a little bit of) sense."

"A couple of guys gave a presentation on what they were working on, and then we gave an introduction to what we were working on. It was fascinating, it was inspiring."

4: Case studies

This section presents 3 case studies informed by interviews with members of The Melting Pot.

Adam, ProjectChange

ProjectChange is an organisation dedicated to creating a community of people who are connected to the care system, through their own experiences of living in care or supporting those who do. Founded in 2020 just before the COVID lockdown, ProjectChange has faced and overcome many challenges since its inception, and The Melting Pot has seen it through this journey. As Founder and CEO, and at times ProjectChange's only member of staff, Adam's experiences at The Melting Pot have been central to the development of this organisation.

Professional impact

Reflecting on his motivations to join The Melting Pot, Adam recalled the monotony of lockdowns, and how having 'a different four walls' to work from was so important after months of spending all his time in his apartment. The change of scene helped him to concentrate, engage with tasks, and create a more distinct boundary between home and work.

"When you'd just spent eight hours in one room, and the last thing you would want to do was spend more time in that room. So I thought, F- this, I need somewhere to work."

At first, Adam found that having the community hosts and some familiar faces amongst the members created the perfect balance of having people to greet and chat to during breaks, while leaving him the space and time to work. The Melting Pot environment was conducive to getting through distinct admin tasks, and in this respect offered a contrast to Adam's other work environment - his apartment - where he could think creatively and develop the more intangible aspects of ProjectChange.

"At the moment, I'm doing a lot of really operational stuff, and it's really tangible, it's tasks that have to be completed. And that's fine being surrounded by people. But a few months ago I was trying to get the big strategy stuff down, and that's a lot of thinking. And actually, sometimes that's better at home."

Working at The Melting Pot also helped to give Adam some perspective on his own ambitions and achievements with ProjectChange. Conversations with CEOs from other organisations demonstrated to Adam how much experience he had gained through this role, and the informal interactions that he had with people of all backgrounds gave him the chance to present himself and his organisation to others in a way that made sense and was representative of his position and capability.

"It's helped establish me. I mean I get it, I am young for a chief executive, but I don't think I was quite cognisant of that or of the professional vertices that I have. But more recently, I've been good at just going up to people I know and talking about something that is really high level."

This was particularly useful given the multitude of roles he filled for ProjectChange - a fact that potential and existing partners often found difficult to comprehend at first.

"I was on a funding call about six months ago, and they said, 'Oh it's really hard with these calendar invites because people want the head of HR and the head of finance, and chief executive.' And I said, well you've got them all - they're all me."

As well as finding himself more established as his membership continued, Adam reflected that ProjectChange grew to be firmly embedded in The Melting Pot. It is the legal base of the organisation, and Adam recalled bringing board members there for their first in-person meeting to show them the space where ProjectChange had its roots.

"I certainly don't think that ProjectChange would have been as successful had we not had The Melting Pot, because it would've just been me in the corner of my living room. It wouldn't have become what it's become without that space and time to be outside and speak to people."

When considering the future of the organisation, Adam sees the relationship between The Melting Pot and ProjectChange remaining a central feature. The sense of continuity that this provides means that Adam can think clearly and confidently about the extent of his own involvement in ProjectChange as it grows, knowing that the organisation has a solid foundation from which it can grow with or without his continued nurturing.

"What I've really enjoyed seeing is Project Change at The Melting Pot. And to me that seems like a really solid foundation. I don't see Project Change moving from The Melting Pot, I see it as being a part of The Melting Pot, a contributor to The Melting Pot. Now, yes - I and Project Change are pretty interlinked at the moment, but I think that relationship will continue after [I move on]."

Personal impact:

For Adam, the experience of COVID lockdowns was characterised by the boredom, loneliness and stress all too familiar to people working from home at that time.

"I think we forget quite how collectively depressed we all were."

His mood, which had suffered during the pandemic, instantly lifted thanks to getting outside, having people to talk to, and being able to have casual work-related conversations – something that had been missing from his social life despite staying in touch with friends remotely.

"I didn't have any colleagues, so there was no one - I could go for days without chatting to another human being on a kind of formal basis. Obviously you'd chat to your friends and stuff, but it's nice to talk about things in a professional setting."

Adam noted that the light-touch socialising that took place at The Melting Pot as social distancing rules were relaxed helped to ease him (and others) back into 'normal' life at a gentle pace. This was characteristic of the way that The Melting Pot continues to facilitate social interactions, which Adam describes as subtly managed without being forced.

"Coming out of lockdown, there was a kind of neutrality there of just smiling and waving and people. And that was good, that really helped my mood."

Over time, Adam has made numerous connections with people and organisations who work at The Melting Pot, to the benefit of his own professional development as well as the development of Project Change. As much as ProjectChange's future is tied to The Melting Pot, Adam is more able to formulate and develop plans for his own future, thanks to the people that he's met there.

"What I've found really interesting is the transferability. Because actually there is a life after this - ProjectChange will not be my forever. And so it's really good to have organisations that you get to know through the people you sit at lunch with and chat to. That's really nice."

Alice, Zing Coaching

Alice is self-employed and works flexibly from home and from The Melting Pot. She is an accredited coach and coaching trainer, who runs her own business and is involved with a number of non-profit organisations as a volunteer and acting COO. She uses The Melting Pot for moments when she needs to focus her mind on the range of admin tasks that come with running your own business and managing other commitments alongside. Since joining, Alice's involvement in The Melting Pot has grown, and she has recently joined their board of trustees.

Professional impact

It was clear from the outset that The Melting Pot would provide Alice with everything she needed for a productive day of work. The environment, the facilities, and the change of scene from home all helped her get into the right headspace to stay on top of the many different professional demands that she faced. But what made the most difference to Alice was the community of people that she has got to know and become part of as a result of her membership.

"For me, the real value of The Melting Pot is the community of people that I have access to as a result of being a member here."

Alice has noticed the small but significant differences that working amongst The Melting Pot community has made to her professional life. Informal interactions and conversations have led to sharing tips, insights and techniques which Alice has applied to her own work practice, building habits and using methods that make her more productive. Additionally, much of her coaching is workplace- and career-focused; working alongside people with a range of styles, practices and needs has provided Alice with a backdrop from which she can be attuned to a wider variety of needs that her clients might have.

"Through The Melting Pot, I meet so many interesting people who do such interesting jobs, and it's really broadened my horizons as to what's out there when I'm talking to clients."

Opportunities to have casual discussions about work with other members of The Melting Pot over a coffee or lunch break has had a knock-on effect for Alice's professional network. She has delivered coaching sessions with members, and made connections with people beyond the immediate Melting Pot community as a result of their recommendations. For someone who works independently, chatting informally about work and building incidental networks is invaluable; without The Melting Pot, Alice would be relying entirely on networking events and expanding through her existing contacts.

Alice has also made use of the more structured aspects of The Melting Pot that facilitate learning and professional development. She mentioned the online resources, discussion boards, and workshops, where The Melting Pot community pool and share their ideas and knowledge. The breadth of expertise and information that she has access to has had a direct and indirect impact on Alice's ability to fill the many different professional roles that she has, as a COO, business owner, volunteer and trustee. She has recruited people for the various charities that she is involved in, crowdsourced answers to clients' questions, and strengthened her own understanding of the social innovation sector in general. On top of which, Alice has enjoyed attending workshops on topics that are unrelated to her work, but touch on something that she is interested in or passionate about in her personal life.

"I've been pleasantly surprised - it's been quite useful topics or interesting topics. There was one recently on a topic I was interested in, it was to do with the circular economy and minimising waste, and while that's not relevant to my job, it is something that I'm passionate about being a part of."

Alice reflected that being part of The Melting Pot helped her to develop a stronger professional identity. In the past, she had lacked confidence in her own abilities, but through The Melting Pot, she had more opportunities to put her skills into practice and develop in areas such as facilitating connections and collaborations between other organisations, introducing people, and

supporting others to develop their own confidence within their field. She found that this was something she was good at and enjoyed, and saw her confidence growing as a result. Alice's skill in this area came in part from her awareness of her own journey and how far she had come since joining The Melting Pot – from feeling unfamiliar with the concept of social innovation, to becoming a trustee of Scotland's Centre for Social Innovation.

"I hadn't fully understood what social innovation meant until I joined The Melting Pot. [...] In the role of trustee, I feel like I've got a greater platform on which to make that sort of thing happen, and better access to the right organisations and people as well."

Personal impact

Alice has noticed the difference that The Melting Pot has made in her personal life, too. She lives alone, and while her work is largely person-orientated, she runs her coaching business independently. For someone who thrives off meeting new people, the bright and friendly atmosphere of The Melting Pot brings a much-needed change of pace to conducting online sessions at home.

"I live on my own in a basement flat, and when I moved into the flat I wasn't expecting to spend so much time there. So it's nice to be in a bright space where you're around other people."

Alice noticed the improvements in her mental health that came from commuting to work and spending time at The Melting Pot. Along with the bright rooms and social interactions, Alice attributed her improved mood to feeling inspired and energised by hearing about the work of others at The Melting Pot.

"I find it really inspiring; I love that people involved with The Melting Pot are all doing things that are trying to help people in some way or help the world in some way."

The different ways that The Melting Pot encourages mutual learning and knowledge sharing meant that Alice was able to contribute and support other members, as well as gaining from the knowledge of her peers. This gave her a sense of belonging, and highlighted to her the role that she played within the community. Alice described feeling motivated and seeing her self-esteem grow as she flourished as an active member of The Melting Pot community.

"It's a good feeling, to feel like you belong to something like that, and you're not just alone out there. Because it can be quite isolating when you just work for yourself."

Jenni, Young Women Scotland

Young Women Scotland is a national feminist organisation for young women's leadership and collective action against inequality. They work across all local authority areas in Scotland and their team are based in Glasgow, Edinburgh, the Highlands and the Borders. They use The Melting Pot as a place to meet as a team since moving out of their own offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Their experiences as members of The Melting Pot have shaped how they work, and will continue to inform their practice as they grow.

Practical benefits

Young Women Scotland has grown from having 2 full-time members of staff to 14, all with varying work patterns between them. The flexibility of pay-as-you-go drop-ins combined with monthly membership package means that the YWS team can use the space as it suits them. Typically, this entails some members of staff coming in a few times a week to work independently, and others coming in once every few weeks for collaborative work. YWS also host their team meetings and staff development days at The Melting Pot, and have found that having a base they all use and are familiar with has resulted in stronger interpersonal relationships within the team, and a more solid operational foundation, as it makes planning and workload sharing easier.

"It would have been a real challenge in term of isolation, team camaraderie, and just being able to connect over workloads, project planning and strategic thinking. The stuff you don't get online would have been lost if we didn't have The Melting Pot."

Jenni also noted that the experience of new members of staff was greatly improved as they were able to attend induction days for new Melting Pot members. Through this, staff were introduced to both the space, and Melting Pot members working for other organisations. It gave them the opportunity to make social and professional connections beyond the immediate YWS team, and become embedded in the social innovation sector in Scotland.

"Having shared inductions [...] was something they found really helpful, in the sense of just easing them in to the

third sector and feeling part of that community, being able to make those connections and contacts and networks. It sort of alleviates some of that anxiety that can come with your first few weeks at work."

Having experienced the benefits of working at The Melting Pot, Jenni and the YWS team have identified a number of priorities that they aim to replicate in office spaces they use in other cities. Along with practical elements such as having flexible membership packages and an accessible and inclusive space, YWS have been inspired to find a space that aligns with and represents their values as an organisation, especially as they develop their new strategy.

"[The previous office] wasn't super young-woman friendly, it wasn't super accessible. And the activities delivered there weren't really aligned to our new strategic plan, so it was kind of an opportune moment."

Working out of The Melting Pot took some of the pressure off YWS to find a new permanent location quickly. As a result, they were able to take a number of steps, including consultation with their clients as well as their staff, to find out exactly what was needed and how to achieve that. Jenni commented that The Melting Pot set a high standard for coworking spaces, and YWS were able to increase their expectations in what they were looking for, while remaining confident that The Melting Pot would provide all their needs in the meantime.

"If we hadn't had The Melting Pot as an alternative space at that point, I think we would've been rushed into making a decision much faster on where we want to go next. [...] It's given us that breathing space to sit back and go, what do we actually need? And we can actually speak to young women and girls, and we can align with our values as an organisation."

The Melting Pot have been actively supporting YWS in finding a new office space in Glasgow. Their expertise and knowledge in the area of coworking spaces has been invaluable to YWS, and gone above and beyond what the team were looking for when they joined. Jenni

reflected that the only way The Melting Pot could do to be more supportive was open a branch of their own in Glasgow!

Professional benefits

Young Women Scotland has benefitted as an organisation from working around other people and organisations with similar interests, values and aims. YWS is a women's movement and stands in solidarity with individuals and organisations in that community. These values are reflected in The Melting Pot's own values, and those of the professional network that uses The Melting Pot. As a result, YWS feel all the more included and valued as a member, and have been able to engage more easily with the movements they support and believe in.

"We stand in solidarity and act in solidarity with other social movements in terms of sustainability, trans rights, and that stuff. So the social innovation aspects of The Melting Pot and what they're trying to do beyond just being a space really align with who we are as an organisation."

Along with hearing about other projects through incidental conversations, YWS has taken part in workshops, presentations, and learning opportunities hosted at The Melting Pot and attended by other organisations. Jennie reflected on the knowledge and skills that she and her team had gained from these events, including learning best practice from

other organisations, supporting each other to work more collaboratively and effectively together, and sharing tips and ideas in person or via the various platforms available at The Melting Pot and through the online community.

Jenni reflected that she and her team had confidence in the partnerships that they made through The Melting Pot, on the basis that they were already working towards the same goals – in this case, fighting inequality across all work environments. As a result, they were able to be more creative, imaginative and daring in their approaches and delivery, thanks to the support available to them. Jenni discussed incorporating creative activities such as zine-making into a project with young women, and offering career and life coaching to YWS staff, both ideas having arisen from conversations with other Melting Pot members. She reflected that these opportunities might have passed her (and YWS) by, had it not been for the proactive and insightful introductions that The Melting Pot's community hosts made.

"We're always super busy as an organisation and we don't always have time to be proactive in that regard. So having someone from within The Melting Pot come up to us and say, 'Would you like to be involved in this?' Or, 'Did you know we were doing this?' has been really good for us because we don't always have the brain capacity to that extra bit."

5: Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions:

1. The Melting Pot environment meets members' personal and professional needs. The atmosphere is friendly and welcoming, and the flexibility of the space enables members to be more productive.
2. Members use the space for a variety of reasons, including as a change of scene from home working, a virtual office and base for their organisation, and a place to host meetings with their team members and clients.
3. The Melting Pot members made valuable connections with people that enhanced their social and their professional networks. People were drawn to The Melting Pot because of the community of like-minded people that work there, and the set-up engenders and encourages social connections too.
4. The Melting Pot members saw their business confidence increase as a result of being part of The Melting Pot. Having a suitable work environment helped them to achieve more in their own work, and being around others working in a similar field helped strengthen their understanding of the social innovation in general.
5. Members picked up skills and knowledge from conversations, workshops and presentations that they were able to take advantage of at The Melting Pot.
6. The Melting Pot membership made collaborating with others in the sector easier. This is achieved through the increased networking opportunities that The Melting Pot members have, getting to know people and organisations beyond those they would otherwise seek for collaborations.
7. The Melting Pot members also feel inspired by the work of others, and more motivated in their own work thanks to hearing about what other The Melting Pot members are doing.
8. The Melting Pot membership has a positive impact on members' wellbeing. The space and the social element of working at The Melting Pot improved people's moods, and members noticed improvements in their work and personal relationships as well.
9. This is particularly important after the COVID-19 pandemic. New job roles, restructured organisations, and flexible working are all part of 'the new normal', and The Melting Pot membership has helped people to adjust more effectively, with positive outcomes for their wellbeing.
10. Members reflected that they were able to contribute to social innovation in Scotland more effectively thanks to being part of The Melting Pot. Membership led to improved practice, increased knowledge and evidence generation, and a broader range of projects being developed and carried out.

Recommendations:

1. Members who have been part of The Melting Pot since it was based at Rose Street reflected that the new space was not as conducive to making social connections, because of the different floors. This was generally caveated with an acknowledgement of the benefits of having distinct working spaces. Incorporating more informal social opportunities, for example allocating coffee-break times, could replicate the social aspect that occurred naturally in

- the Rose Street space, and help new members to integrate more easily.
2. Suggestions made via the survey and in interviews indicated that having more spaces to make private calls would benefit a large proportion of members, as the nooks are popular and often full.
 3. Thought most organisations found the packages to be financially effective, some individuals found the membership costs expensive or prohibitive. This was particularly true for members who were employed but covering the costs themselves.
 4. Having more flexible access hours included in standard packages would benefit a large proportion of members whose work is not restricted to standard weekday hours.

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