Allia IMPACT

MADAM
Absurd Arts Makery

The Founders Pit Stop

Impact Report

In partnership with

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What is the Founders Pit Stop?

The Founders Pit Stop is a programme designed and delivered in partnership by Allia Impact and Madam Makery. It addresses a critical gap in business support: the tendency to overlook the founder as the primary asset. Moving beyond traditional business advice, the programme puts founders' self-awareness, resilience and creative thinking at the heart of business growth.

The programme combines practical business support with guided creative practice, giving founders the space to step back from the day-to-day demands of running a business. By bringing together strategy, reflection and creativity, the programme helps founders build resilience, strengthen decision-making and reconnect with the thinking that drives innovation.

The Founders Pit Stop grew from Allia Impact's wider business support work, specifically through Hackney Impact. It was here that Allia first supported Madam Makery founder Agathe Cury as she developed her venture. As the relationship evolved, and collaborations emerged, so did a shared belief: founders need more than technical business advice. Together, we began exploring how business support and creative practice could work hand in hand to help founders thrive.

That concept is at the heart of the Founders Pit Stop - the programme builds on years of collaboration, trust and experimentation. Agathe's journey from programme participant to delivery partner demonstrates how long-term founder support can evolve into innovative partnerships that create wider social impact.

The pilot iteration of the Founders Pit Stop ran from 29th May 2026 to 19th June 2026.

Pilot at a glance:

- 12 female founders
- 16 hours of programme delivered
- 192 hours of founders support

> *Combining business support with creativity workshops is a genius idea. If it was all business or all creative, they wouldn't be as impactful.*
>
> Participant

Where has this come from?

The Founders Pit Stop evolved organically from the Hackney Impact ecosystem. Agathe Cury, founder of Madam Makery (MM), joined this Allia-led project in early 2024 as her company took its first steps.

A networking event for creative businesses led to "Trash to Treasure" - the first time Allia and MM worked together. Paul Wight, Hackney Impact programme manager, joined several of MM's workshops as part of Hackney Impact whilst Agathe engaged with several of the business support elements the project delivered.

This forged a shared belief: creativity must be at the heart of working with people. This is reflected in the testimonials they have written about each other's work:

"*The approach used here - drawing us in via practical examples in the most respectful way - makes all the difference between Hackney Impact and other accelerators or courses I have participated in*."
Agathe Cury, Hackney Impact Post-Programme Survey

"*I've had so much fun with Madam workshops this year - they're a breath of fresh air. I spend so much time wrapped up in the day to day of my work and having some space to work with my head and my hands and my heart at the same time is so precious. At times it's been like a safety valve for my own headspace and capacity to think outside the box.*"
Paul Wight, feedback from Madam Makery & Queertopia workshop

The Founders Pit Stop reflects this shared understanding of the isolation and burn out that founders face - and a belief that together we could do more than we could apart.



The challenge

Behind every venture is a founder making difficult decisions, navigating uncertainty and carrying the weight of responsibility. While traditional business support helps founders develop their business, it rarely creates space for them to develop themselves.

Through our work supporting entrepreneurs, we've seen the same challenges emerge time and again. Founders often struggle with isolation, burnout and the gradual loss of the creativity that inspired them to start their venture in the first place.

Isolation

Founders repeatedly described the emotional impact of building a business alone. Many spoke about feeling disconnected from peers, losing confidence and putting their own wellbeing second.

> *"I stop caring about taking care of myself because I don't meet people anyway. I don't exercise as much, I mostly don't care what I look like or how I dress."*



Losing Creativity

Every participant identified themselves as creative, yet more than half said time and money prevented them from engaging in creative activities.

For many, creativity had become another pressure rather than a source of inspiration.

> *"I have to be creative, but to a professional standard. I find it hard to play."*

Traditional business support provides essential knowledge and practical tools, but founders also need opportunities to reflect, reconnect with their creativity and build relationships with people facing similar challenges.

Our approach

The Founders Pit Stop is built on three simple principles:

- Stronger founders mean stronger businesses.
- We can do more together than we could do on our own.
- Creativity is an operating mode, and it is at the core of entrepreneurship.

The Founders Pit Stop model operates on the principle that the sum is greater than its parts. Over the four weeks of pilot delivery, every session split into two complementary halves:

Business support

Our audience are expert entrepreneurs wary of wasted time; they want a learning environment that is directly relevant to their businesses. One that focuses on the challenges they face, and helps them develop solutions they can take out of the room and apply immediately.

We designed workshops around themes like reflective practice and liminal spaces (how we handle uncertainty). The workshops followed a consistent structure - facilitators introducing a framework, then immediately drawing on the group's experience to co-create tangible outcomes.

We committed to this approach because we have learnt that:

- Direct instruction is not what this audience wants or needs.
- Experiential and peer learning are more effective at developing and applying new ideas.
- Co-creation and acting on feedback helps address the isolation that many founders struggle with.

> *I had never considered the concept of liminal spaces within a business framework before. It was good sitting and absorbing the ideas whilst working the clay. Also to continue the discussion with peers as we created.*

Creative practice

Madam Makery's workshops merge humour, highly inclusive perspectives, and a non-hierarchical approach to foster genuine self-expression.

They rely on a simple assumption: when founders play with unexpected prompts and materials, the pressure to perform vanishes.

These hands-on sessions use clay, embroidery, collage, and upcycled items and a range of playful materials.

No artistic skill is required: the goal is "imaginative defiance", play designed to loosen the mind and break routine thinking.

This "safe failure" acts as a circuit breaker for the exhausted business brain. By focusing on tactile sensation rather than strategic output, the workshop disarms defensive thinking.

The result is clarity: the mental fog lifts, and participants reconnect with the reasons that drove them to become founders in the first place.

The sessions give founders time to sit with the morning's workshop, rather than rushing straight back into their businesses. Founders find themselves in a space, physically and mentally, where it's OK to forget about KPIs and expectations for a while.

> *Thank you for sparking my creativity again. Creative thinking is what I've loved most about running a business and it's about time the two were linked!*



Breaking bread

The two halves are bridged by a shared lunch. Breaking bread together builds connections and trust. Where possible, Allia alumni provided the catering - keeping value circulating within the community.

The programme

Week	Business support	Creative practice
Week 1	**The Pit Stop** Define one problem, crowdsource solutions.	**Radical Sparkle** Collage and glitter for imaginative protest.
Week 2	**Reflective Practice** Map feedback mechanisms; build a development plan.	**Boundary Embroidery** Embroider designs to explore personal boundaries.
Week 3	**Liminal Spaces** Navigate uncertainty; share decision-making tools.	**Get Gargoyling** Sculpt protective monsters from clay and reclaimed materials.
Week 4	**The Road Less Travelled** Define strategic goals and milestones.	**Full Medal Jacket** Craft self-awarded medals to celebrate what you've built.

Each session was designed so that business learning and creative practice reinforced one another, creating space for founders to think differently, learn from one another and leave with practical tools they could apply beyond the programme.

> *"It was complimentary. The business discussion about reflection, data, and feedback led me to think about wellbeing outcomes for others, in the community and the world. The boundary embroidery exercise reminded me to think about outcomes for myself!"*



Learning outcomes

The Founders Pit Stop pilot was planned with clear objectives and outcomes in mind, and our success in delivering against these shows up again and again in the post-programme surveys:

Objectives	Outcomes
Analyse your lived experience	Clarity on how pressure affects wellbeing.
Evaluate how you want to lead.	Reconnect with your purpose and change your approach to work.
Restore creativity and resilience.	Experiment with creative practice beyond the programme.

These outcomes translate into powerful changes in the way that participants are leaving the programme and these are also captured in their quantitative responses.

Post-Programme results

100%
Are motivated to grow their venture

100%
Have clear next steps for growth

100%
Felt part of a supportive community

92%
Feel better equipped to use creativity

12
Using new skills or technology

11
New products or services developed

Participants experience

By creating a space for founders to work together and share lived experience, we established an environment that connected people to each other – and to the wider ecosystem that we all operate in. These connections address isolation, stress, and uncertainty by giving founders relationships they can lean on.

> *Please keep on doing this, I loved meeting all the people in the room. It made me feel less alone with my challenges and helped me with helping myself, boosting my confidence by being able to share some of my wisdom and help others with advice.*

Participants also reported that the dual-mode delivery enhanced their learning. 92% of participants feel better equipped to use creativity to support their founding purpose/business than before this programme, which is a testament to this innovative format.

The Founders Pit Stop proves that creativity is not a distraction, but a powerful mode of operation that restores agility and resilience.

> *I enjoyed being alongside fellow founders and connecting business challenges with creativity. It helped me zoom out of the day to day grind of my business and reflect on the greater vision.*



Creating wider value

The Founders Pit Stop was designed to support founders, but its impact extended beyond the participants themselves.

Investing locally

Rather than simply delivering activity, the programme intentionally invested in the local entrepreneurial ecosystem:

- 83% of the programme budget was spent with five local businesses (two of which were also Founders Pit Stop participants).
- Four of those businesses were Hackney Impact alumni.

This approach ensured that investment circulated within the local economy while creating new opportunities for businesses already connected to the ecosystem.

Stimulating innovation

Although only four weeks long, the pilot coincided with participants developing:

- 11 new products or services
- 12 new technologies or processes

While these outcomes cannot be attributed solely to the programme, they suggest that creating space for reflection and experimentation can accelerate innovation.

Strengthening collaboration

The programme itself grew from a long-standing partnership between Allia Impact and Madam Makery. That collaborative approach was mirrored by participants, who independently began work on three new partnerships during the four-week pilot.

The pilot showed that investing in founders creates value beyond individual businesses. It strengthens local networks, supports local enterprise and creates the conditions for innovation, collaboration and future economic growth.

What we've learnt

The Founders Pit Stop was designed as a pilot: an opportunity to test a new approach, gather evidence and understand where this model can create the greatest value. The pilot has strengthened our confidence in the model while highlighting important considerations for future delivery.

One of the clearest findings from the pilot was that combining business support with creative practice created a richer learning experience than either approach could achieve alone.

> *"It allowed me time to reflect on my practice and reasons for doing what I do. It gave me more tools to improve my overall business strategy."*

We reached founders who were ready to reflect, and the cohort became a space for solidarity rather than just networking. Confidence, connection and tangible business results followed, and those connections are already turning into post-programme collaborations.

While the pilot demonstrated that the model is both viable and valuable, it also highlighted opportunities for future development:

- Future programmes need to be properly resourced to be sustainable in the long term.

- Participants consistently asked for more time. Extending the programme would enable deeper learning, stronger relationships and greater long-term impact.



What's next?

The Founders Pit Stop has shown what's possible when founder wellbeing, creativity and business support are brought together through a collaborative partnership. While this pilot involved just twelve founders, the potential extends much further.

The pilot has provided a strong evidence base for developing and refining the model, exploring how it can support more founders, strengthen local ecosystems and contribute to more resilient, innovative businesses.

Learn more about Madam Makery

Learn more about Allia Impact



Contact us

Paul Wight:
paul.wight@allia.org.uk

Agathe Cury:
agathe@madam-makery.com

The challenges founders face continue to evolve.

Business support should evolve with them.

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"*In confusing, challenging times [...] for the first time in years I managed to take a step back and focus on my business and my craft and reconnect both on a very pragmatical level but also on an emotional level.*
THANK YOU."

Participant








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