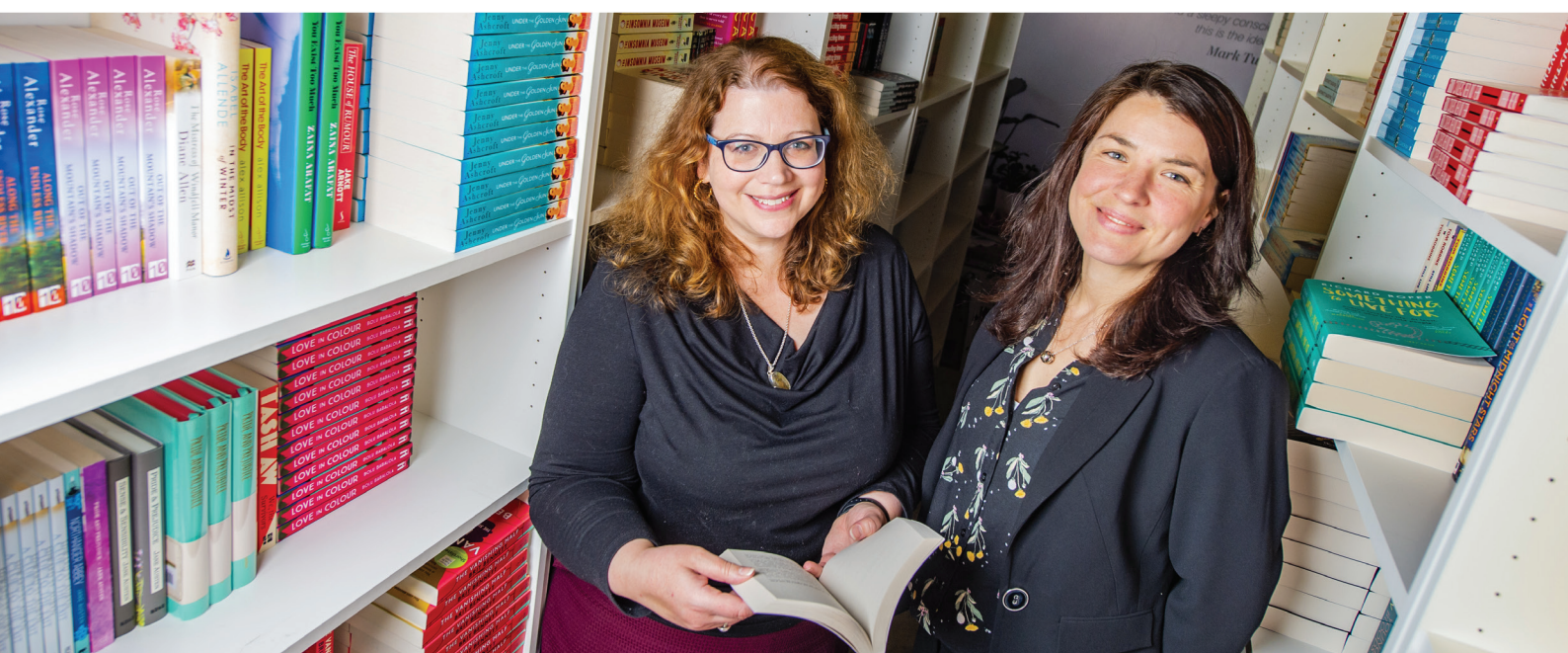




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Case Study



Willoughby Book Club

Part-funded by:



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"We didn't have any business experience and Joanna provided that continual voice of sanity. It's taken a long time to get through just learning about the day-to-day survival to now having more confidence and thinking strategically."

**Marianne Charla,
Director**



Business support means a new chapter for Willoughby Book Club

No one said it would be easy taking over a business. But the challenges of the last two years were never meant to be part of the story for the Willoughby Book Club. Director, Marianne Chala faced a fire that destroyed the premises then a global pandemic. The latter also led to discovering some hidden weaknesses in the business.

Willoughby Book Club began in 2012 as a family business operating from a kitchen table in the south Leicestershire village of Willoughby Waterleys. Today, it is a leading bespoke book subscription service, based in Blaby, that caters to all reading tastes and ages with around 5,000 subscribers.

Marianne took over the business in 2019 with friend Danielle Rowley. However, just before taking over, the new owners faced their first major challenge when a fire broke out at their premises making the business 'homeless'. The fire was a huge blow, but they managed to secure premises with a neighbouring business, M3 Create Print, where they remain to this day. No sooner were they back on their feet and beginning to get to grips with the organisation, the pandemic hit.

Marianne said: "The pandemic struck just as we reached our first anniversary. Although it was a period of financial success it showed up every weakness in the company and gave us visibility on what needed to change."

Marianne reached out to the Business Gateway Growth Hub before the pandemic and had already started working with Adviser, Joanna Moore on developing growth strategies. However, during the pandemic, a different kind of support was needed as the focus shifted from growth to survival once again.

"Joanna gave us just what we needed at the time. During the Covid-19 crisis, I was regularly advised on the furlough scheme. I was supported with helping staff return to work, arranging a socially distanced workplace, flexible hours and working from home options."

Support from the Business Gateway continued after the initial distress and upset of the pandemic as new challenges began to present themselves.

Marianne continued: "We didn't have any business experience and Joanna provided that continual voice of sanity in the madness. It's taken a long time to get through just learning about the day-to-day survival to now having more confidence and thinking strategically."

"We're working more efficiently now too, half the team of 10 work from home successfully and we've cut our costs. With Joanna's help, we've improved communication and implemented better HR practices."

"There's also been concrete support on putting together financial and business plans. She's made me focus on the stuff I don't really like, or know, but is necessary. That gentle accountability was very good for me."

She adds: "Some of these things I would never have known about or got involved with had it not been for the process we have gone through. We are a different organisation from the one we were a few years ago. I also personally feel like I've transformed from having an employee to a leadership mindset."

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Support: Advice through the pandemic, marketing, leadership and HR

Impact: Improved efficiency and communication, new HR practices, reduced costs

Area: Blaby

Employees: 10

Delivered in partnership with:



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