

FINE CELL WORK



ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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A Year of Regrowth

In 2022 Fine Cell Work celebrated its 25th anniversary. It was a chance to take stock, to reflect on the positive outcomes of the last 25 years and to look to the future.

Our uniquely creative mission has value for prisoners, prison leavers and for society more broadly. We decided that 2022 would be the year of rebuilding our work in prisons, which had been drastically reduced by lack of access during the pandemic. It was also to be a year of regrowth in the broadest sense. We seized the chance to amplify our impact by reaching more people than ever and planting the idea of Fine Cell Work in as many places as possible, growing our community.

Fine Cell Work is a UK-based rehabilitation charity and social enterprise which makes beautiful handmade products in British prisons. For over 25 years we've been transforming the lives of people in prison and prison leavers, one stitch at a time.

Set up in 1997 by Lady Anne Tree following years of lobbying the government to change prison rules about prisoners earning money from work done in their cells, Fine Cell Work operates in 30 British prisons engaging with up to 400 predominantly male prisoners. Our stitchers are supported by our skilled and valued volunteers who visit prison fortnightly to teach needlework.

By providing purposeful activity to prepare prisoners to successfully reintegrate into the community, we are working to improve their skills and well-being. This is key to reducing recidivism. External evaluation demonstrates that the making of high-quality needlework boosts prisoners' self-worth, instils self-discipline, and fosters hope.

Collaborating with world-renowned designers to create one-of-a-kind, limited edition products, we support people in prison and prison leavers to finish their sentences with work skills, money earned and saved, and the self-belief to rebuild meaningful, independent, crime-free lives.



Letter from the Chair of Trustees

I am delighted to present Fine Cell Work's 2022 Annual Report, and to introduce myself as the charity's new Chair.

I would like to thank Sophie Kingsley, our previous Chair whose tenure as a Fine Cell Work Trustee spanned an incredible 16 years. During Sophie's time as Chair, Fine Cell Work grew significantly and matured as a charity, and she championed a number of initiatives that raised awareness of Fine Cell Work and our mission. She left Fine Cell Work in a robust position, and has been wonderfully supportive to me in the transition.



Having become Chair in June 2022, I have been privileged to see the manifestation of the charity's theme this year of Regrowth. From the early months of the year, when Covid restrictions were still in place in prisons, through our Stitcher's Garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show in the summer, and a series of exciting events and new products. It's been gratifying to see Fine Cell Work thrive as we emerged from a globally challenging time.

We celebrated our 25th anniversary in 2022. This significant milestone was marked by the release of *Threads of Time*, a limited edition illustrated book that tells 25 stories about our stitchers, products, and mission. We were fortunate to have contributions from Fine Cell Work collaborators Esther Freud, Isabella Tree, Tracy Chevalier and Louis de Bernières and many talented writers from 26, a not-for-profit organisation of writers who helped create *Threads of Time*. The book launch was marked with a party where we welcomed many old and new friends to join us in reflecting on the 25 years since our founding.

But of course, 2022 wasn't just about celebration. Our mission is reliant on the work that we do with our stitchers in prison and our apprentices at Open the Gate. This Annual Report details the many hours and activities that were required to get Fine Cell Work groups up and running again in prisons, delivering on our promise of providing paid, purposeful and creative work to prisoners to support their mental, emotional and financial resilience. Our production is increasing back to pre-Covid levels, and we are expanding our capacity and impact through more work at prison workshops.

Our stitchers create the beautiful products we have become known for and of which they are rightly proud. 265 stitchers returned finished work in 2022. We are indeed rebuilding after the Covid-related restrictions on prisons, and we have our incredible volunteers to thank. Tireless, generous, and caring, our volunteers visit the stitchers every fortnight, bringing new work, coaching, and compassion.

We are eagerly looking forward to the year ahead. Our theme in 2023 is "One Stitch at a Time", signaling both the path for the charity's continued regrowth and that of our stitchers, as they rebuild their lives in and out of prison. As one of our stitchers wrote: "*I would like people to know that the stitching isn't made in a gloomy prison cell, but in a place where I am making big changes in my life for the better, by a person who enjoys the work.*"

Thank you for continuing to support us.

Jennifer Rademaker – ***Fine Cell Work, Chair of Trustees***

Our In-prison Programmes

Fine Cell Work has three in-prison programmes:

1. **Cell groups** of 10-15 prisoners, who are taught hand-embroidery and other needlework skills by our volunteers, who visit on a fortnightly basis to run two-hour sessions
2. **Lone stitchers** are talented and motivated individual stitchers who have transferred to prison where there is not an active Fine Cell Work group
3. **Prison Workshops** of up to 20 particularly accomplished stitchers and machinists who have been trained to use Fine Cell Work's unique production system

Whether created in a cell group, a workshop, or by a lone stitcher, each stitch helps us create our growing range of products, special commissions and one-off projects.

Progress in 2022

Prisons remained in lockdown for the first three months of 2022. We were unable to run our usual cell groups, in all but three prisons. This brought our stitcher numbers down and slowed down our growth. During that time, we continued to work either directly with our stitchers or, where possible, through prison staff to ensure the distribution and collection of kits. In this way stitchers were able to continue receiving, completing and being paid for work. In spring, lockdown restrictions eased and prisons began gradually reopening.

By the end of 2022, we were running **19** cell groups in **14** prisons.

This lack of access to prison groups made it difficult to ascertain accurately the number of stitchers we were engaging with in prison, but we continued to support all the stitchers who had registered with us, unless we were sure they had either been released or had left the prison. At a minimum, we continued to send our biannual newsletter – now produced as a magazine called *Stitch Up* – to all stitchers, and sent in feedback forms.

When our in-prison volunteers returned to their groups, we were able to begin to gather more accurate statistics, broken down as follows:

265 stitchers returned work in 2022, compared to **175** in 2021

We had **179** new stitchers in 2022,
up from **69** in 2021

Of those 179:

149
were in cell
groups

31 were
workshop
stitchers

1 worked in a
cell group and
a workshop

127 of our new stitchers returned work in 2022

We worked in **32**
prisons in 2022 –

14
had cell groups

and a further

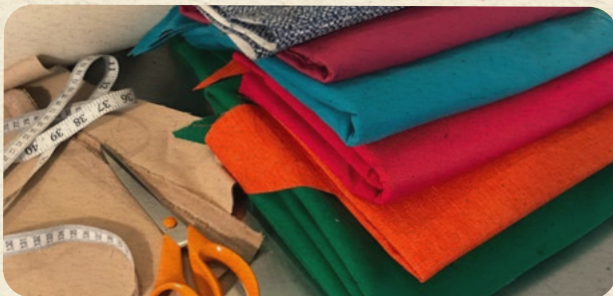
18
housed at least one
lone-stitcher

Hussain's story

I was introduced to Fine Cell Work in 2017, when I was about eight months into my sentence. I liked the idea of keeping myself occupied and learning a new skill. So, I applied to join the stitching group and, two weeks later, I started. Every fortnight we had a two-hour group session led by fantastic Fine Cell Work volunteers, Cherry and Jacqui. They taught me the skills I have today and I will be forever grateful to them.

I've worked on some great projects. My favourite kit was the tablecloth for the *Animaux* collection, which is beautiful and requires top quality skills. My first commission was designer Ai Weiwei's 'Odyssey in Quilting' which I really enjoyed. The feedback I get from designers and from the Fine Cell Work team is really inspiring. I have also had numerous letters and cards from customers which makes me feel I am doing some good, and my work is being appreciated.

Apart from my mental wellbeing and the fact I am helping a charity, working for Fine Cell Work passes the time while building my skills and it allows me to help my family financially, which is rare. I have also been very lucky to work with another stitcher to develop his skills and take on commissions, which is doing his mental health a lot of good.



Partnerships in Prison

The cooperation of staff in the prisons in which we work is hugely important in enabling what we do. Without them, our stitchers would not be able to access the Fine Cell Work programme or benefit from the support of our volunteers.

That's why we were pleased to launch the **Fine Cell Work Prison Awards** in July 2021. Created to acknowledge the hard work and exceptional goodwill we receive from each of the several prisons we engage with, our Prison Awards resulted in seven wins across four categories:

- One prison was presented with the Gold Award for Best Practice in Volunteer Support
- Two prisons were presented with Outstanding Contribution to Fine Cell Work Awards
- Three prisons were presented with Gold Awards for Staff Engagement and Support
- One prison was presented with the Lone Stitcher Support Award

To commemorate the awards, framed certificates and letters were sent directly to the Governor of each of the seven prisons, crediting specific members of prison staff and acknowledging and thanking every individual who has provided our stitchers and volunteers with ongoing, exceptional support.



Open the Gate Programme

Fine Cell Work's post-release programme, Open the Gate, originally part-funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and is based in our London community workshop in Battersea.

Here, our specialist staff and volunteers provide prison leavers with support and training, aiming to bridge the gap between prison and further employment and education opportunities.

Since opening in 2017, Open the Gate has supported 74 prison leavers whom we call 'apprentices'. While some of them have previously stitched for Fine Cell Work in prison, anyone who meets the criteria for Open the Gate is welcome to apply.

Of our apprentices, about 40% moved into secure employment upon completing the programme and a further 16% went on to further tertiary training or volunteer roles.

What we can be sure of is the impact Open the Gate has in transforming lives. For instance, our reoffending rate is less than 2% compared to the national average of 40%.



Progress in 2022

In **2022**, staff and volunteers at the Open the Gate programme have:
 Provided employment training for **28** apprentices (up from **26** in 2021)

Engaged with **31** apprentices, of whom:

11
 were new
 recruits

14
 identified as being from an
 ethnic minority background

9 were women

Received
 more than
40
 referrals

Facilitated
20
 workshops

Seen **10**
 apprentices graduate

Supported **3** previous
 graduates with advice and
 wellbeing support

Increased our
 mentor/mentee
 relationships to
8

2022 was not without challenges, but there was also plenty of good news to celebrate. One of our 2022 graduates moved into permanent employment with two others receiving funding from the Michael Varah Memorial Fund which supports further tertiary training and/or funds tools and equipment for employment opportunities. Both graduates have now set up their own businesses.

Following the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, 2022 was very much about building new relationships and carrying on the Open the Gate programme. We now have a stitching group underway at Euston Hub and are in discussions with HerStory House about working to help more women, post-release. Prisoners Abroad continue to be a fantastic referral partner, and we have also developed new relationships at The Upper Room and Stand Out.

Hugh Lenon on what it is like to be an Open the Gate mentor

Hugh is a co-founder and chairman of Phoenix Equity Partners. A former Chair of the Hardman Trust, he is currently Chair of Brixton Prison Employment Advisory Board. In 2022, he mentored an Open the Gate programme graduate.

“Mentoring can make a real difference to the prospects of men and women who are, or were once, in prison and who now want to make best use of their time and talents. That’s what motivated me to become a Fine Cell Work Mentor.

After registering my interest, I was invited to attend a Mentor Induction Day and a few months later began mentoring an Open the Gate programme attendee. Logistically it was very well organised by Fine Cell Work, with sessions between me and my mentee, J, taking place once every two weeks for around three to four months. For two of the sessions, we were joined by a staff member from Fine Cell Work’s Programmes team which added structure and accountability to the process.

J is talented and ambitious and I enjoyed getting to know him. At the end of each of our sessions, I would always try to leave J with a couple of suggestions for him to explore before we next met – what might be called “irons in the fire” which he would then go away and investigate. These suggestions always related to training or employment. He was very motivated, and he impressed me with his reliability and proactivity.

After a few sessions, I arranged for J to talk to someone working in an area that interested him – technology and data analysis. It gave him a better understanding of what specific skills and actual experience employers might require in that area, and what a typical working day in that sector would really look like. This helped him focus on what precise steps to take in order to secure work in that area, whilst also managing his expectations.

My role as mentor was intended to help J transition to life after prison by offering encouragement and support and constructive challenge, where appropriate. I think that’s the job description – to open mentees’ eyes to new ways of thinking, whilst also helping them to keep it ‘real’.

Re-integration post-release is clearly tough. My experience is that most prison-leavers want to make a fresh start, but it’s not easy. So whatever can be done to help should be appreciated. I would absolutely recommend being a Fine Cell Work Mentor. Helping J to focus on his future was a very rewarding experience.”

J said: “The support, social aspect and guidance from my employment mentor has made a huge difference in terms of my outlook and potential future career. The courses that he recommended have been very helpful.”

Our Volunteers

In the 25 years since Fine Cell Work was first established our community has grown to include more than 100 volunteers involved in directly delivering our programmes.

There are multiple ways for volunteers to get involved with Fine Cell Work. Opportunities include running in-prison groups and workshops, mentoring apprentices on the Open the Gate programme, assisting the Fine Cell Work production and commissions teams, as well as helping to run fundraising and supporter events. Many of our volunteers are embroidery enthusiasts and experts, and some have different roles – helping at a pop-up shop or Christmas event one month, and visiting an in-prison workshop the next.

Whatever role they play, without our volunteers we literally would not be able to offer our services. They are integral to Fine Cell Work, and we're so grateful for their partnership with us.

In return for their expertise and passion, our volunteers get the opportunity to join a meaningful community. Our stitchers appreciate the encouragement and support of the volunteers who give up their time to share skills and knowledge. Likewise, for the volunteers, the experience is often incredibly rewarding as volunteer Lucy can attest to:

“It’s a huge privilege to volunteer for Fine Cell Work. I’m probably not the only person who finds it rewarding to be able to use my stitch skills in a way which evidently changes lives for the better, how great is that! I also get a sense of care, fun & fellowship from working at Fine Cell Work.” – Lucy, Fine Cell Work volunteer



Progress in 2022

In **2022** we had a total of **114** volunteers working across **166** volunteer opportunities, including our Christmas reception and summer pop-up shop at Peter Jones store in London.

This breaks down as follows:

In terms of our prison volunteers, we had

49 opportunities across **14** prisons

7

volunteers worked in our London workshop as part of the Open the Gate programme

7

mentors provided advice and support to our Open the Gate graduates

We delivered

11 events,

at which we were supported by

54 volunteers

8

volunteers assisted the Productions Team

6

volunteers assisted the Commissions Team

We had

9 volunteer talks,

delivered by

5 volunteers

We had **25** opportunities to volunteer at **2** pop-up shops. Shifts were covered by a total of **22** volunteers

35 of our **114** volunteers (**30%**) supported Fine Cell Work by working **2** or more volunteer opportunities

Over **80%** of our volunteers have worked with Fine Cell Work for **more than five years**, with more than half of that number volunteering for **over 10 years**

The dedication and support of our volunteers gives them a strong connection with Fine Cell Work's mission, and they are truly vital to our work. In 2022, one of our longstanding volunteers who has been working with us for an incredible 24 years – was awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours List, for her services to Fine Cell Work and the wider community.

Our volunteer April on what it is like to run a Fine Cell Work stitching group

Entering a prison is like going into another world. You arrive at the gate with your sewing kits, a notebook and a prison pass. You leave everything else in the car – handbag, phone, umbrella – before being escorted through numerous locked doors to the room where we work with our stitchers.

We have 15 in our group and it is all very relaxed and friendly. There's a good atmosphere as they saunter in. If a stitcher has finished their work, it is always neatly folded up and presented to us – sometimes casually by an established stitcher, or more shyly if it's a new member. We always open up the piece to check it over and share our praise. We are very aware each piece has been stitched by someone sitting alone in a cell. A lot of time and energy goes into pattern reading, stitch counting and thread selection. Stitchers become attached to their creative work, and it is important to acknowledge their effort and skill.

We give new stitchers practice pieces to teach them the skills of canvas work and embroidery before they are allowed to stitch one of our Fine Cell Work kits. Some give up quickly, but most persevere and stay with the group. It is wonderful to see quiet, introverted men become confident and talkative as they progress. Our more experienced stitchers also mentor new recruits, which is a joy to witness. Everyone is eager to try new designs, so we try to be scrupulously fair when they are handed out. Small things can become very big in prison.

We become very attached to our stitchers and see their highs and lows. We often have fascinating conversations and, as we are unaware of their crimes, we only see them as they are now. We are always sad to say goodbye to someone, even if it is for the happiest of reasons.



Matt's story

Stitcher Matt works with April and other Fine Cell Work volunteers as part of an in-cell stitching group.

"Every day, as routinely as I do my daily ablutions, I assess my current stitching project with the discernment of an armchair virtuoso. Yes, I am a stitcher and embroiderer. Trust me when I say that's a sentence I never thought I'd write!

I probably spend 2-3 hours a day with a needle, more on weekends, depending on which piece I'm working. Some kits I've enjoyed stitching more than others – the ferns with all the bright colours and varied stitches was a pleasure to work on. I prefer the challenge of the larger designs, because although I can drift off with the repetition of some stitches, I like how embroidery helps me concentrate and practice my own mindfulness. It's the best of both worlds.

Some pieces can be tedious – imagine my eyes rolling back into my head while I gesticulate wildly, screaming 'Why!' at the ceiling. Other rage-inducing pieces can make or break a man, such as when the fabric has puckered up so much that only three days of sleeping on it between two mattresses can flatten it. Sometimes I'll hear the screams of prison-hardened men as they discover yet another bird's nest at the back of the canvas. Nevertheless, whether I've been contentedly singing or muttering ever louder and more colourful expletives with every French Knot I've pulled, I always finish a piece with a sense of achievement.

It has been awesome to see my work in *Stitch Up* magazine and to complete my OCN certifications. Fine Cell Work has been a real lifeline. Not only has stitching provided a little nest-egg ready for when I walk through the gates, it also kept me driving through some tough times. I appreciate the nation as a whole struggled during the pandemic, but for those of us banged-up for 23 and a half hours a day, 7 days a week, putting needle to canvas was so beneficial. We won't forget that Fine Cell Work volunteers carried on their support, even during that difficult period. From socially-distanced kit-exchanges between April and our prison officers to the volunteers who wrote personal letters of encouragement to individual stitchers, the commitment has been inspiring.

Prison would be a far darker place without organisations like Fine Cell Work and people like your volunteers. I am in awe of you all. Thank you."



The Social Enterprise

For many of our stitchers, one of the most valuable things about working with Fine Cell Work is the fact that the products they create are bought and appreciated by customers. This gives them income they can save and provides a connection with the outside world.

With all our products, customers also have the opportunity to communicate directly with the stitchers who created them. Every thank-you note and letter sent to a stitcher helps build self-esteem and confidence.

So what exactly goes into the creation of a Fine Cell Work product? Here's a brief breakdown of how the product is made:

- A number of designs from both reputed designers and our in-house design team are developed to make sure they provide a variety of work for our stitchers at different skill levels and also appeal to our discerning customers
- The product is sampled in prison to finalise the technique and colourways. Detailed stitching instructions with photographs are then prepared.
- Once a design has been approved, we order high-quality linen, cotton, canvases, threads and wools
- The materials and threads are then sent from our London hub to one of our workshops in prison, where they are made up into kits, ready to be stitched
- The completed kits are returned to our London hub, to be distributed amongst our team of volunteers
- The volunteers then take the kits into prison and hand them out, demonstrating the relevant techniques as required. Each kit requires a different skill level: beginner, intermediate or advanced
- The stitchers then take the kit back to their cells to stitch the products
- During subsequent prison stitching group session, the volunteers assess stitchers' work and support them as they complete each piece
- Once a piece is finished, it will be returned as a flat front to our production team by the volunteers
- The stitchers are paid for their work as soon as the piece is returned to the office



- The work is checked over in our London hub to ensure it meets the high level of craftsmanship required to sell it – only then is a piece ready to become a finished product
- Pieces are then sent back into a prison workshop to be made up – cushions, for example, will be padded and a concealed zip added
- The finished products are returned to our London hub and then go on sale on our website and at events

Creating a product can take up to **200 hours of skilled work**, with up to **70,000 stitches per piece**. A pay bonus is awarded for work which has been carried out to a particularly high standard.

Our prison workshop is an integral part of the social enterprise, giving the workers who are based there a real appreciation of their relevance to the wider organisation. The work is essential to the outcomes of Fine Cell Work – without it, most products would not be finished. Their key role in the production process helps further boost the workers' self-esteem, develops their ability to be a part of a team, and broadens their employable skills.

The prison workshop re-opened in April 2022 with **13 stitchers** and, in the months since, we have engaged with **44 stitchers** in total.



A day in the life of a Fine Cell Work stitcher working in a prison workshop – Ian's story

Ian works in one of our prison workshops, where stitchers make up kits for groups and individual stitchers also make up the final products before they are sold.

"Fine Cell Work is a lot more than just an activity – it's made me feel human again. When I go to the workshop I am treated with respect the moment I walk through the door, so that's where I leave any negativity. I am part of a community of stitchers, and there's no judgement.

I have been in the Fine Cell Work workshop for over 12 months now. One minute I might be sewing napkins, the next making swag bags, then it's onto cushions or aprons. Every day is rewarding as I get to learn more skills, whether that's hand stitching or machine work.

I've always been a hands-on individual, and I enjoy the freedom I am given to think for myself. I've also completed several OCN courses during my time with Fine Cell Work.

Working for those certifications allowed me to create my own designs, as well as enhancing my skills and encouraging me to be more versatile. This led to me being given more responsibilities and getting involved in the workshop's production planning processes.

Whether it's a task like creating batch numbers or orders of work, canvas stretching, cutting off fabric or adding zips to cushions, every aspect of the plan is checked before moving on to the next step. Once the items are completed, I spend time doing quality checks. If there are any minor errors the work is given back to the stitcher, helping them with their learning and confidence.

Being in the Fine Cell Work workshop, it's like I've found my purpose in life. It's something I actually enjoy doing, and not just for myself. Another big part of my day includes helping others. I am all about sharing knowledge and will go the extra mile to support the team. I often, throughout my day, will stop and look inwards. As I think about what's going on around me, I am amazed at how much work we achieve together.

Whatever I am doing, my days are always rewarding. Fine Cell Work has given me a very positive mindset. I strive to produce outstanding quality of workmanship, and in return I get a huge sense of pride from knowing something I've made will be sold for the public to enjoy.

I do enjoy the sheer variety of work we do in the workshop, but if I was asked what I like best I'd say machine work. I find when I'm sat at a machine sewing it's very therapeutic. It puts me in my good zone – it's like a feeling of sewing my mind back together."

Our Designers

Our talented designers are key to the success of our social enterprise. Without their willingness to collaborate and work with us to create beautiful products, the Fine Cell Work social enterprise would not work.

Sophie Ashby's poppy-covered designs are a case in point. Part of the 2022 Studio Ashby collection for *Sister*, it was Ashby's first with a charity partner. Products in this range, which also featured a wonderfully idiosyncratic set of Koi Carp napkins and cushions, are inspired by nature. All the designs, including the popular Geometric cushion, have a contemporary, modern, pared-back style. Our stitchers' careful creativity has brought them to life in a riot of colour and skill.

"Fine Cell Work is a charity I really believe in, and collaborating with them supports our ambitions as an ethical business." - Sophie Ashby

In 2022, we launched 25 new products, including those in the *Sister* by Studio Ashby range, our successful *Joy of Print* collaboration with Cath Kidston, *Hedgerow* with designer Kit Kemp, and the Newton Paisley collection, created by conservation biologist Susanna Paisley.

Following the popularity of our handstitched Christmas napkins, we launched a small product run of Fine Cell Work designed lavender and mimosa table napkins and expanded our UK landmarks needlepoint range to include Stonehenge. These new products sold out extremely quickly.

Finally, to celebrate our anniversary, we designed and launched a new Christmas decoration: the Great British Sewing Bear. Despite only being available in November and December, this little bear was the most successful small item launch in Fine Cell Work's history, and accounted for a fifth of our total Christmas decoration sales.

From our in-house designers to our renowned collaborators, every Fine Cell Work product has been considered and created with incredible care. We are grateful to everyone involved, and hope our customers treasure our products as much as we do.



Sales Update:

Our overall trading income in **2022** was **£275,793**

In the early months of 2022, the impact of Covid-19 was still apparent. Online sales were 48% down in the first two months, compared to the same period in 2021. This is because in 2021 due to strict lockdown restrictions, these months were an exceptional time for online activity. Therefore, in comparison to 2021, our 2022 online sales were slightly lower – 4% less than in 2021.

Gratifyingly by year end, total sales returned to the record levels of 2019, helped by the significant growth in online sales.

Online sales in **2022** were **72%** higher than 2019

While there has been an increase in online activity, the most significant percentage rise in trading income from the previous year came from sales at events.

Income from product sales at events at **£37,724**, more than **trebled** last year's total of **£11,907** with **85%** of this generated in the second half of the year.

Sales of our new products and ranges, including our handstitched napkins and the new Stonehenge landmark range, accounted for nearly **17% (£46,611)** of our total trading income. We achieved record sales across the *Sister* by Studio Ashley, *Joy of Print* and Newton Paisley ranges.

The top products stitched this year included:

- The Joy of Print range
- The Studio Ashby collection
- Our Great British Sewing Bear

Other bestsellers were:

- The Christmas letters
- Christmas Cards
- Threads of Time book

Interesting facts:

Shipped to **15** countries, top **3** countries are: USA, Australia and Canada (excluding the UK)

Shipped to **2,200** customers

Posted a total of **7,796** products

Of the top **10** most popular products, **7** were new items

Commissions

As well as working on Fine Cell Work's beautifully designed products, our stitchers, supported by our design team, also take on commissions. Transforming or converting original artwork into hand-embroidered products is a time-consuming but very rewarding task, and our most talented stitchers have worked on some incredible projects.

In 2022, those commissioned projects included our collaboration with Holy Trinity Church Sloane Square, which saw our team work with designer Cressida Bell to create a special high altar kneeler. At 38 feet in length, the kneeler will be in five sections. We had already received 4 of the 5 embroidered kneelers by year-end. Once completed and delivered, the kneelers will be permanently positioned at the altar rail.



We continued to collaborate with contemporary textile artist Carolina Mazzolari throughout 2022. A relationship that began six years ago, Carolina's artwork *Void* was part of the Fine Cell Work Human Touch exhibition at Sothebys in 2020.

Other commission highlights included the creation of 45 machine-embroidered, velvet-backed linen evening bags for the Lady Mayoress of the City of London, made in our Clothworkers' Studio, and 70 doves handstitched in our cell groups, which were made into Christmas decorations for our longstanding design partners, Blithfield.

In 2022 our earnings from commissions were up **28%** on 2021.

The overall total was **£35,006**.

A commissions highlight in 2022 was the completion of a ceremonial cloak for the High Sheriff of Greater London and her two future successors.

Created in partnership with the London College of Fashion and their community programme, Making for Change, the cloak was embroidered by Fine Cell Work's stitchers with 13 images that reflect the role of the High Sheriff and the values they want to encourage – kindness, fairness and respect. The design also featured landmarks of London including the Thames, the Tower of London and the London Eye.

The cloak was formally presented to the current High Sheriff, along with her two future successors, at a special event held in London's beautiful Merchant Taylors Livery Hall.



2022 News and Highlights

Threads of Time

“*Threads of Time* is a moving testament to the power of the needle, and the varied and vital work Fine Cell Work has done with UK prisoners. I get a little tearful every time I dip into it!”

Tracy Chevalier, *author and contributor to “Threads of Time”*

Released in spring 2022, our beautiful illustrated limited-edition hardback book *Threads of Time* tells 25 unique stories that span the 25 years Fine Cell Work has been teaching needlework skills to stitchers in British prisons.



The project, which was brought to fruition thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign, came about after Fine Cell Work Founding Director Katy Emck OBE met Elise Valmorbida, author and board member of 26, a not-for-profit member organisation of writers, back in 2018.

Fast forward four years and the result is *Threads of Time* – a series of unique writings that reflects on Fine Cell Work’s achievements, from our founder Lady Anne Tree’s prison reform campaigning to some of our extraordinary projects, such as the HMP Wandsworth Quilt, author Tracy Chevalier’s Sleep Quilt, contemporary artist Ai Weiwei’s Human Flow and Fine Cell work’s first pet commission, based on author Louis de Bernières’s cat Toby.

Writers who contributed included Esther Freud, whose stage play *Stitchers* was based on the fictitious stitching group taught by our founder Lady Anne Tree; Isabella Tree, Lady Anne’s daughter and the author of *Wilding – the Return of Nature to a British Farm*; poet and copywriter Rishi Dastidar, whose specially commissioned poem *A Twitch on the Thread Pulls us Forward* features in *Threads of Time*; and many other talented writers from 26.

Each of the 25 chapters focuses on a different piece, reflecting the skill of our stitchers, the designers who created them, and the stories behind the projects. *Threads of Time* is a celebratory book, but it is not just about celebrating 25 years of Fine Cell Work. It’s also about sharing positive stories that connect back to our stitchers and the prison experience. As Katy says: “These are stories of humanity, creativity and collaboration. It’s about moving away from the darker narratives associated with prison, and celebrating that spirit of hope.”

The creation of *Threads of Time* is in and of itself a story of collaboration, creativity – and crowdfunding. As Katy says, in many ways this reflects Fine Cell Work’s own growth. “25 years ago we started out very small, with only £2,000 to support us,” she says. “We had this unlikely-sounding idea, but we’ve grown and grown... and sales of *Threads of Time* showed us that there is a great enthusiasm among our supporters, and indeed the general public, for positive stories like these.”

The reaction to *Threads of Time* has been wonderful. We’re grateful to all those who helped us create the project, particularly Elise and all the authors. And to everybody who donated, bought a copy or sent a great review – thank you.

The Stitchers' Garden

Fine Cell Work's Sanctuary Garden at the 2022 RHS Chelsea Flower Show highlighted the benefit of gardens for improved well-being. *The Stitchers' Garden* reflected both the mission of Fine Cell Work, and the slow, focused, creative quality of needlework and its benefits on stitchers' mental health.

Designed by Frederic Whyte and built by Louis Champain of Champain Landscapes and Brampton Willows, the garden featured a series of pavilions one of which replicated the real-life dimensions of a prison cell. A transparent pool with three fountain jets evoked the dynamism and clarity of the creative process, whilst the clever planting represented the creativity and colour that needlework brings.



The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) themselves described the garden as 'restful and inspiring... reflective and uplifting, expansive and optimistic, solitary and celebratory, calming but colourful' – all words that might be used to describe the act of needlework and its impact on stitchers.

Visitors to the garden, who may otherwise not have heard about Fine Cell Work and perhaps never have considered what life is like for people in prison, got a tiny glimpse of our stitchers' reality.

It also generated a significant amount of press coverage, including a broadcast interview between our trustee Cath Kidston MBE and Monty Don on *BBC Gardeners' World*, which used the *The Stitchers' Garden* as its setting. The garden received good newspaper and magazine coverage that the garden received, all of which helped us get the message about Fine Cell Work out to an even greater audience.

After the success of the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, the garden was moved to a prison in Suffolk, where it remains open to all prisoners, many of whom were also involved in preparing the site, planting and laying the pathways and fences.

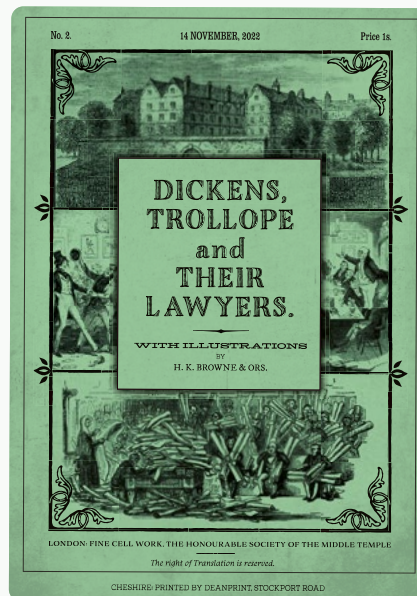


Dickens, Trollope And Their Lawyers: A Performance At Middle Temple

In November 2022 we hosted a fundraiser event at the spectacular Honourable Society of the Middle Temple in London, one of four Inns of Court in England and Wales.

Inside this historic venue of the Middle Temple, 180 guests, largely from the legal sector, watched actor Simon Callow bring *Dickens Trollope and their Lawyers* to life, reading from a script by our former Chair of Trustees HH Geoffrey Rivlin in an exclusive performance. Simon was ably assisted by long-term Fine Cell Work supporter Patrick Gibbs KC as narrator.

With our beautiful products available to buy, it was not only a hugely entertaining evening but also a great chance to share the fruits of Fine Cell Work's mission.



Overall, we raised an incredible **£44,000** from donations, sponsorship and ticket sales, and sold around **£6,000** of stock.



Press Highlights

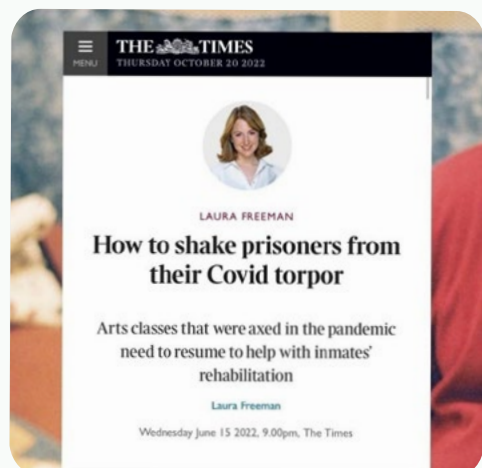
From the success of the *Stitcher's Garden* to the release of *Threads of Time*, our 25th anniversary year resulted in a significant amount of press coverage for Fine Cell Work. Here are just a few highlights...

- Robert Dex from the “Evening Standard” wrote a piece on our collaboration with the London College of Fashion who designed the new cloak for the Lady High Sheriff of Greater London which was hand-embroidered by our stitchers.
- Serena Fokschaner from “House & Garden” spoke to our Founding Director Katy Emck about the therapeutic value of needlework for people in prison.
- Kat Lister from “The Guardian” wrote a dedicated piece about Fine Cell Work which featured a conversation with Executive Director Victoria Gillies and an apprentice.



- Jack Rear from “The Telegraph” covered our ‘Stitchers’ Garden’ at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2022. The garden, which won a silver medal in the ‘Sanctuary Garden’ category, was featured multiple times in various publications.
- The garden was also the setting for a BBC interview with our Trustee, Cath Kidston MBE with the Monty Don, presenter of the popular TV series *Gardeners’ World*.

- BBC Radio Solent also featured interviews with Victoria Gillies, an apprentice and Trustees Kit Kemp and Cathy Robinson.
- Laura Freeman from “The Times” covered the importance of creative rehabilitation programmes in prison and featured Fine Cell Work as her step-grandmother had been a prison volunteer who taught needlework to groups in prison for 10 years.



- Sarah Ashford, a modern quilter and freelance writer has written a series of articles for *Today's Quilter* magazine based on the theme of 'Patchwork and Perseverance' including an article about Fine Cell Work and the 25th Anniversary
- We were featured on the inside front cover of *Inside Out* the FCDO Association magazine in their year-end issue

The year culminated in our being featured twice over the Christmas period on BBC Radio 4. The first was in "All in the Mind" – the show on how we think, feel and behave. It delves into the evidence on mental health, drawing from psychology and neuroscience. Claudia Hammond, the host for the show, visited our Hub to interview Victoria, Jordanne and Ben, an apprentice, to talk about the benefits of stitching on mental health. This was featured in the episode "Can you Knit Away Your Worries" released on 27 December. It highlighted the therapeutic and rehabilitative benefits of stitching on prisoners and prison leavers.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who was detained for six years in Iran, before being freed and coming home, was the third guest editor for the *Today* programme over Christmas 2022. Nazanin talked about how sewing and knitting helped her keep calm during her imprisonment. She made her daughter a 'freedom' dress. This programme featured the work done by Fine Cell Work in British prisons and included interviews with a stitcher, staff and a volunteer.



25 years of Fine Cell Work

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we wouldn't be where we are today without our amazing community.

The activities and results of the year underlined an important Fine Cell Work message, which is that the work we do has value, in large part because of the community effort it takes. Just as a product uses a variety of threads, colours, stitches and techniques to create something beautiful, so too does our Fine Cell Work community.



Bruce's story

Previously an in-cell stitcher and then a lone stitcher, Bruce has been involved in all our prison programmes and then was an Open the Gate apprentice. He has been a part of the Fine Cell Work community for 8 years and counting. Here's his story, in his words.

On the waiting list

"In prison, I kept seeing people walking around with tapestry loops and fabric, and I wondered what they were doing. Someone told me these two ladies from Fine Cell Work come every two weeks to teach embroidery, and stitchers then progress up through the stages. I was intrigued, so the next time I saw them I asked to go on the waiting list. It was a couple of months before I got into the Fine Cell Work group, so when I did start, I was a bit nervous."

Starting out

"The two ladies who led our group were called Jacqui and Cherry. They were so welcoming. Knowing that they do it as volunteers and come into this unknown environment, I've got every respect for them.

You get a basic piece of material to start with. You learn to do straight lines and all the shapes – triangles and so on – and all the different patterns, then you stitch round them. Then you go on to a piece of canvas and start learning different techniques, hand embroidery, all that.

The first project you make is a little pin cushion. After I'd done that, I started progressing through the Fine Cell Work Stitcher kits for beginner, intermediate and advanced."

In the workshop

"Later I moved to a prison that had a Fine Cell Work workshop, which is where they produce some of the bigger items and you can learn machine skills. On the recommendation of Jacqui and Cherry, Fine Cell Work staff got in touch with the workshop staff, who then asked me to join that workshop.

So I got going on the sewing machines and Overlockers. I started doing my Open College Network (OCN) certifications too – I progressed through all the certificates and got a Gold Award for outstanding work. Eventually I became a coordinator of the workshop and was able to dish out projects to different stitchers. If they got stuck I'd help with a piece."

Becoming a lone stitcher

“As I became more confident I also became a lone stitcher, and was able to work on some commissioned pieces. The rug created for Ditchley House was amazing. We had 18 stitchers, each working on a five-foot long piece, using double-cross stitch. I also enjoyed working on *The Void*, which was commissioned by artist Carolina Mazzolari for the Sotheby’s exhibition in 2020, and also stitched a commission of a pet Jack Russell.

The most difficult stitch for me to master was Petit Point. It’s canvas work, lines going down and across... it’s really fine detail.”

Open the Gate – and beyond

“I was really hoping I’d get the Open the Gate place, and I did. It gave me confidence outside, and it was great to meet all the team here who’d been giving me the work that had helped me so much in prison.

Being part of this group – you always look forward to going there and honing your skills. It’s a friendly place, so calm, never any quarrels.

I graduated from Open the Gate in early 2023. Not long after I received the Hardman Trust Award, which allowed me to get a sewing machine to use at home, and funding from the Michael Varah Trust to help me purchase carpentry work tools.

Since graduating from Open the Gate I’ve gone back to doing carpentry, but I incorporate stitching into lots of my makes. So I’ll make the chairs, the covers, and cushions and bags. I recently refurbished some church pews for use in a Golf Club’s bar area – they were 12-foot long with padded cushions in a special tartan.

I still stitch for myself as well. For last Remembrance Day, I made a cushion with a poppy on it and the words ‘Remember Us’ and was able to present it to the Chelsea Pensioners to go into their museum.”

Reflecting on Fine Cell Work

“I was recently diagnosed with Asperger’s, which has made me think about the confidence I always lacked. But Fine Cell Work gave me so much confidence. It shows that when you’ve got the time and with people behind you, it gives you the motivation to keep going. Not everyone has that. The two ladies who introduced me to Fine Cell Work – they always had time, it didn’t matter what the situation was. There could be other issues in your head. They’d just understand.

It definitely changed my life. I look back at the work I did and think, wow.”

Volunteers Jacqui and Cherry

Jacqui Wood and Cherry Conway-Hughes have been volunteering for Fine Cell Work since 2003. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, they worked together for many years supporting Fine Cell Work stitchers, including Bruce and numerous others, as they led a series of in-cell groups.

The early years

Jacqui: "I started working for Fine Cell Work back in 2003. I'd been teaching textiles and embroidery at the Adult Education College in Wimbledon for 20 years, and one of my students helped out at Fine Cell Work. She told me they were looking for a new teacher to lead a stitching group in prison and suggested me. I met Katy Emck, went into a prison with another volunteer called Sandy, and was hooked. I thought being part of Fine Cell Work might help just some of the prisoners who have had appalling lives from spending their whole lives in prison."

Cherry: "I bumped into Jacqui in Sainsbury's one day — we knew each other because we'd done City & Guilds Embroidery together. She told me what she was doing with Fine Cell Work and I read up about the charity and thought it sounded a brilliant idea. So I joined her, and we've been leading groups together ever since."

The first prison visit

Jacqui: "I've never been afraid in any prison. Perhaps my years of teaching gave me confidence in managing a group... and I had Cherry with me! We are a good double act."

Cherry: "I wasn't apprehensive at all either, for some reason!"

The cell groups

Jacqui: "Ideally, for us, we would have no more than eight in a group. The sessions are two hours, and we make time to chat, discuss and have a laugh, as well as teach stitches and techniques."

Cherry: "We'd demonstrate basic embroidery stitches, and give them a sampler to complete before we give them kits. We'd check the work they did and do all the book-keeping as well. We took photos of all their completed work and also gave them files to keep these photos, instructions, and letters from customers in. These files became very important to them, something to be proud of. If we had any visitors to the group, they would show the files to them."

Jacqui: "Fine Cell Work products are expensive to buy, so we always stressed the importance of doing VERY good work. Often this led to customers writing thank-you letters, which the stitchers adored. Proof positive their work was admired. I think they looked forward to our visits. We were a link to the outside."

The stitchers

Cherry: “When we met Bruce he began, as many of our stitchers did, by being loud and demanding – but as he got into the stitching, he calmed down and became a very helpful member of the team. He would not allow any others to be rude or misbehave. He had a great sense of humour and made the sessions fun.”

Jacqui: “Once Bruce started doing the OCN accredited courses he really became a pillar of the community.”

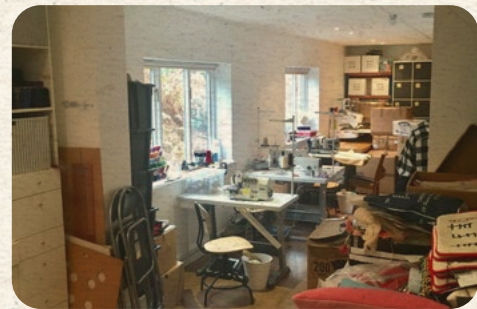
The impact

Jacqui: “Even the officers would remark on the calming effect stitching seemed to have on the men in our groups. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, they were being praised for work they had done and the pride in their achievements was enormous. They made friends and learned to help others, as well as seeing the importance of following instructions and working as a team.”

The effect

Cherry: “I found such huge fulfilment working with Fine Cell Work. I loved seeing the incredible difference it made to the men we worked with and it was such a privilege to work on big commissions. We met a range of fascinating people, both inside and out.”

Jacqui: “One very special memory I have is of a new stitcher coming into the group. I explained to him that Cherry and I were volunteers who would teach him to sew so that he could learn a skill and earn money. He said, ‘so you get paid by the charity?’ and I replied ‘no, we are volunteers.’ So then he said, ‘but you get money for the work we do?’ and I said ‘no, we are volunteers’ again. Then he left the room. I wondered what on earth I’d said wrong, but he returned with two packets of Bourbon biscuits from his lunch ration. He gave one to Cherry and one to me and just said, ‘thank you.’ You can’t ask for more than that!”



Meet The Community

Battersea Workshop Manager Jordanne Cliffe

Jordanne has been working with Fine Cell Work for eight years, initially as a supervisor in one of our prison workshops. When we launched Open the Gate, our post-release programme in our London Clothworkers Studio in 2017, Jordanne moved over to manage the Hub and our apprentice stitchers.

Stitch by stitch

“I’ve learnt so much doing this job. When I started working part-time as an in-prison workshop supervisor over eight years ago I knew how to stitch, but I wasn’t amazingly skilled. I always knew just a little more than I was teaching the stitchers though, so it was OK – I stayed one step ahead. Now, I would say I am quite skilled. What I’ve learnt has come from everyone: the other members of staff and volunteers, and the stitchers themselves. One of our Open The Gate apprentices taught me needlepoint.

But all the stitching is really secondary to the other skills you need. Knowing how to be patient and teach is the most important thing in this job. And doing this has given me the confidence to teach my own workshops. I’m also a jeweller, and I’ve pursued this interest alongside my work. So teaching stitching workshops made me think, well, why don’t I do my own jewellery workshops as well?”

Open the Gate – aka The Hub

“When I moved from the prison workshop to set up the Hub, our London workshop for stitchers who are post-release, it was quite a challenge for me. I wanted to stay in the prison where I felt I could be more immediately helpful. But I remember clearly Victoria (Gillies, Fine Cell Work’s Executive Director) saying: ‘Listen, you can support more people in the long run with the Hub,’ and that persuaded me.

Supporting our apprentices in the Hub is different to working with someone in prison. In prison it’s rigid and there are set rules, but here in the community you need to set the boundaries yourself, so that can be more challenging. Really early on with Open the Gate we realised one of the biggest challenges is dependency. We’ve created and continue to create a really safe environment for people to come to once they leave prison. They find community and can grow here, but that can make it hard for people when it’s time for them to graduate from the OTG programme.”

Graduation

“How we deal with the challenge of dependency is by talking about moving on from the very early days. We’ll plant the seeds during people’s reviews, and we give them loads of warning. We want to prepare them. We’ll also line something up for them to move on to like volunteering or a training course. It’s about making them feel stable and resilient, teaching them skills that can translate directly into work.

We like to encourage real examples of things they can talk about in an interview, so if for example an order is wrong, they have to problem-solve, negotiate, and talk with the customer. And we always say, if they can learn to stitch they can learn anything.”

What happens in the workshop

“At Open the Gate, we do sampling of new designs and commissions and we work on Fine Cell Work’s bestselling products. That’s where we’ll see a lot of collaboration between the volunteers and apprentices. The Hub also provides training, for example showing people how to use a sewing machine. And our apprentices get the chance to work with our sales teams, with warehouse management,, dispatching, product sales, and so on.

Typically, I’ll manage the project plan and look at who is the most suitable apprentice to work on a specific product or commission. I rely on the volunteers a lot for support in the Hub. They are highly skilled in embroidery and all sewing techniques. They’re the ones who do a lot of the teaching here.”

Hub highlights

“Anyone that graduates is a highlight. I love seeing people grow, and it’s also lovely to see people return. They’ll sometimes come back and visit us and you can see them confident and reassured, whereas when they start the programme they are often nervous and scared.

One particular highlight was a Women’s day we had where one of our out-workers – an apprentice who has graduated but still works for Fine Cell Work on a freelance basis – came back to visit. We had another lady here at the time who was just about to graduate and more women who were completely new, and it was really powerful having all these women who were at different stages of their journey together. The apprentices found it really inspiring.”

The importance of making mistakes

“Here in the Hub, one of the things that is really apparent is that people are not afraid to make mistakes. You need to not be afraid to make mistakes when you’re learning, so we talk about this a lot. Everyone at one point will forget to put a label on, or put a zip on the wrong way. Everybody hates piping. Making mistakes is how you learn.

And people tend to surprise themselves with what they do pick up. All you need is a few stitches, and the possibilities are endless.”

Our Funders

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Statement of Financial Activities

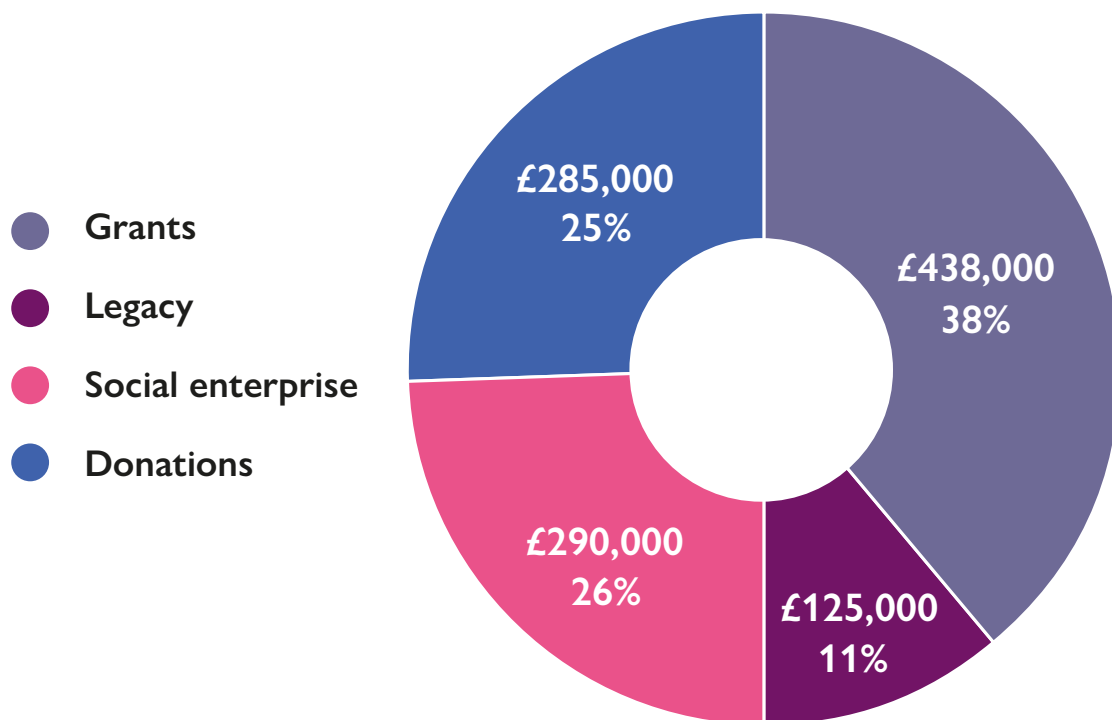
(Incorporating The Income And Expenditure Account) for the Year Ended 31 December 2022

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Designated Funds*	Total 2022	Total 2021
	£	£	£	£	£
Income from:					
Donations and grants	422,096	425,464	-	847,560	835,868
Charitable activities	290,193			290,193	280,524
Investment income	3,859			3,859	41
Total income	716,148	425,464	-	1,141,612	1,116,433
Expenditure on:					
Cost of Raising Funds	279,336			279,336	172,528
Charitable activities					
Prisoner Training & Support	414,948	474,807	-	889,755	777,484
Total expenditure	694,284	474,807	-	1,169,091	950,012
Net in-come/ (expenditure)	21,864	(49,343)	-	(27,479)	166,421
Transfer between funds	71,237		(71,237)	-	-
Fund balances at 1 January 2022	600,932	58,035	185,559	844,526	678,105
Fund balances at 31 December 2022	694,033	8,692	114,322	817,047	844,526

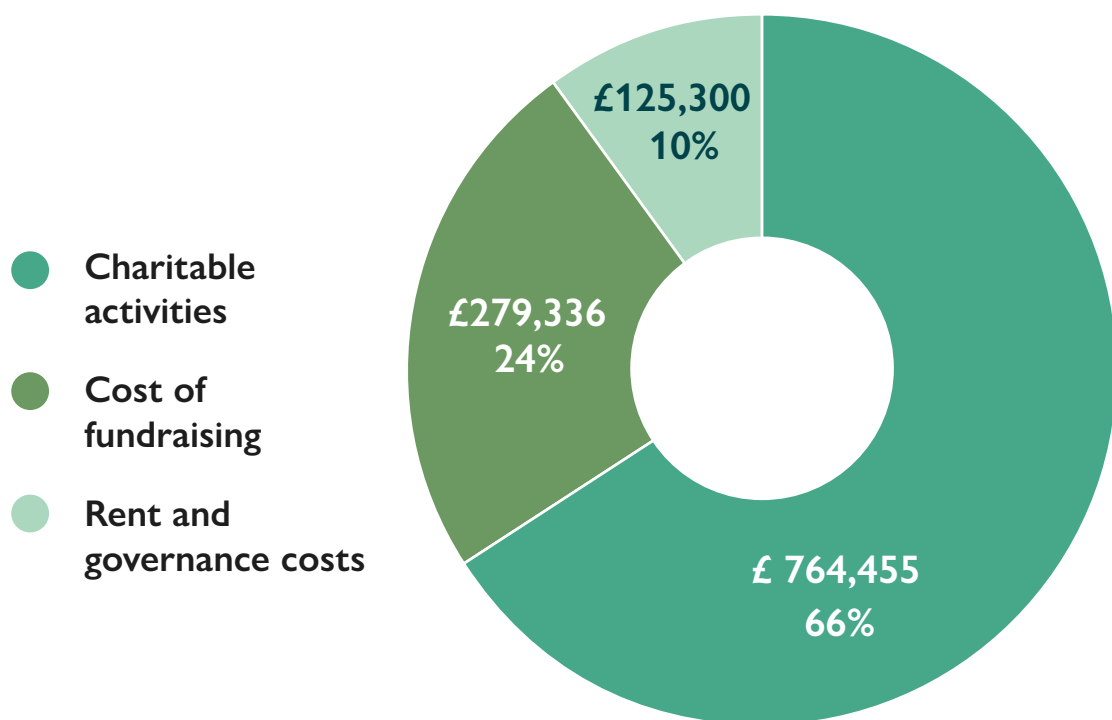
In 2022 Fine Cell work received £437, 815 from grants from Trusts and Foundations.

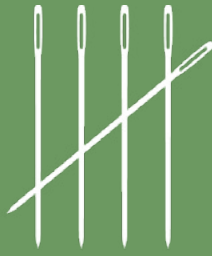
*from an appeal made in 2021.

Income



Expenditure





FINE CELL WORK

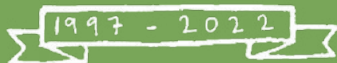
“It is such a great stepping stone, and it’s helping me adjust to life after prison. It’s made me look forward to what’s out there – to look forward to new things.”

FCW stitcher



CELEBRATING

25 YEARS



For over 25 years we’ve been transforming the lives of people in prison and prison leavers, one stitch at a time.

Without your support, none of what we do would be possible.
Thank you.

Produced with special thanks to: Nicola Slavin & Kathryn Corlett

Report compiled by Vani Krishnaswamy

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