

## CELEBRATING FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

### WINNERS ANNOUNCED AT 2023 EVERYWOMAN ENTREPRENEUR AWARDS

**London, 6 December 2023:** Selected from nearly a thousand entries, 11 extraordinary women from across the country have been unveiled as the 2023 winners in the UK's longest-running recognition programme for female entrepreneurs. [The everywoman Entrepreneur Awards](#), in association with BGF and NatWest, was held on 6th December 2023 at The Londoner Hotel in Leicester Square, where over 400 talented women and supporters of female entrepreneurs united to celebrate the achievements of these extraordinary women and their businesses.

For over two decades everywoman has been at the forefront of the drive to increase the number of female entrepreneurs, working with government, industry bodies and the corporate sector to accelerate the rate of progress and dismantle barriers that remain for women, particularly when it comes to accessing funding, growing, and scaling their businesses. Despite a record breaking 150,000 women founding new businesses in the UK last year and all-female-led companies representing over 20.6% of UK businesses (up from 16.7% in 2018), the percentage of total deal value for all-female-founder businesses has decreased from 5.8% in 2016 to 3.5% in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking about the awards, **Maxine Benson MBE, Co-Founder of everywoman said:**

“The everywoman Entrepreneur Awards have a central role to play in highlighting the disconnect between the growth ambitions of female founded businesses and their access to funding. These brilliant women are wealth and job creators and the businesses we must be investing in for the growth of UK Plc. The awards are a call to arms for the investment and finance communities to double down on their efforts to understand how they can better serve these ambitious, unstoppable female founders.

For the past 20 years these awards have provided a platform to share the stories of hundreds of entrepreneurs; encouraging, emboldening, and empowering other women to follow suit. We are thrilled to celebrate the winners' success and hope their ambition, resilience, and innovation to start, grow and scale their businesses, against the odds, will go on to inspire others and provide the motivation that will strengthen the backbone of the UK's economy.”

**The everywoman Woman of the Year Award** was presented to **Helen Cannon, Founder & CEO of ISON Travel Ltd, from Surrey**, who was described by judges as “a

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<sup>1</sup> [Accelerate to Excel, November 2023 report](#)

force to be reckoned with". ISON Travel delivers corporate travel management for clients that want exceptional service and with a phenomenal 300% growth since 2019, from £9.7 million turnover to £40million in 2023. Helen grew her business from scratch in 2013 after deciding that she couldn't make the corporate world work for her and her family of five children. Helen has built ISON Travel with the firm belief that, regardless of personal circumstances, every woman should have the opportunity to pursue a career in their chosen field. Helen's humble, people-focused approach and passion for recruiting women whose skills are not being utilised in a traditional workplace setting wowed the judges. She employs a diverse workforce of talent, 70% female and 50% part time who have delivered 4x growth in 2 years, with offices in London, Southampton, Singapore, Dubai, India, and Philippians.

### **THE 2023 CATEGORY WINERS ARE:**

- **SOLOPRENEUR AWARD – sponsored by Nutriment** - awarded to a woman running a business as an independent sole trader.

**Emily Pomroy-Smith, Founder of BamBonn, from Trowbridge.** Emily turned a personal challenge into a thriving 6-figure business within four years. Her quest for sustainable, ethically made sleep protection for hair led to the creation of BamBonn. Launched in 2020, BamBonn transformed Emily from a disabled mother on benefits to an award-nominated disabled entrepreneur with a growing team of women. The BamBonn quickly went viral, becoming a sought-after cult hair item worldwide. Demand for BamBonn skyrocketed, making it a game-changer in the industry.

- **MUMPRENEUR AWARD** - awarded to a woman who founded her business whilst raising a child/children aged 12 or under.

**Cait Salanson, Founder & Managing Director at The Little Kitchen Company, from Winchester.** Cait left a senior role in Financial Services in 2010 to launch the Little Kitchen Company (LKC). LKC was born out of a passion for amazing food and customer experience, as well as a desire to better balance the challenges of a growing young family. LKC has grown (from a 'little kitchen' at home) into an award-winning business employing over 70 permanent staff. As a supporter of women in business, she is proud to offer senior roles to talented women, building on their pre-established work and life skills and talents.

- **SMALL ENTERPRISE AWARD – sponsored by NatWest** - award celebrates an inspiring woman who has founded a profitable business with less than 25 employees:

**Ibi Eso, Founder & CEO of Bridgehouse, from London.** Established in 2006 Bridgehouse provides flexible company secretarial services and excellent governance support for companies and organisations and has had an average 30% growth every year and now employs 22 staff (employed and self-employed contractors). A trained lawyer and Chartered Secretary, Ibi has over two decades' experience working with boards to embed good governance frameworks within their organisations, from multinationals to membership organisations. Ibi leads a rapidly expanding, multi-skilled international team with a single goal: to make a real difference to clients.

- **SCALE UP AWARD – sponsored by BGF** - celebrates a woman who has founded a company that is in a period of high growth, achieving 20% growth or more in either employment or turnover year on year for at least 3 financial years:

**Aimee Connolly, Founder & CEO of Sculpted by Aimee, from Dublin.** The award-winning company is one of Ireland and UK's fast-growing beauty brands, with the range increasing from one product to over 100 since it launched in 2017 and has developed a strong following and loyal community online. Aimee was 24 years old when she set up the brand which remains entirely self-funded, with Aimee starting to save the capital she needed to launch when she started working part-time at 16. Now with 55 staff and counting, over 500 stockists in Ireland and the UK and the Middle East, the brand also recently opened a flagship store on Grafton Street, Kildare Village, Belfast Victoria Square & London Carnaby. They also boast an education arm, Sculpted the Academy which has trained hundreds of make-up artists since it opened. In 2021 Aimee also won the top prize in the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Awards in the emerging category and in 2022 she was named Young Businesswoman of the Year in the Image PWC.

- **INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION AWARD – sponsored by Rathbone Financial Planning** - awarded to a female founder who has successfully expanded her product/service to a new geographic market:

**Emily Bendell, Founder & CEO at Bluebella, from London.** Emily studied Politics, Philosophy & Economics at Oxford University and had a brief stint as a journalist before turning her love of lingerie into a career and launching her business in 2005. Bluebella is a lingerie brand on a mission to redefine sensuality with the core brand principles of Strength, Fashion, Modernity, and Inclusivity. Selling internationally via ecommerce and wholesale the multi-award winning brand has a team of 40+ based out of East London and selling internationally, with the US business growing by 30% year on year. Emily is also a mentor and advocate of women, campaigner, mum to two and step mum to one.

- **THE NEXT LEVEL AWARD – sponsored by SG Kleinwort Hambros** - awarded to a female founder who has a highly profitable business (above £1,000,000 EBITDA):

**Sally Alington, Founder & CEO of Ethos Farm Limited, from East Mosely.** An experienced business leader and entrepreneur, Sally's passion for this sector comes from over two decades of working with airports, airlines, retailers, travel retailers, hospitality and leisure organisations and it is this frontline and hands-on experience that drives the belief at the heart of Ethos Farm – your employees are your biggest asset and brand ambassadors and should be front and centre of organisational culture and CX strategies. Sally's commitment to philanthropy is clear with accessibility, diversity and inclusion being key areas in which the Ethos Farm business excels by supporting clients to achieve more.

- **ENTREPRENEUR FOR GOOD AWARD – sponsored by Specsavers** - Awarded to a woman who has founded a business that contributes to the greater good, whether this is through a social enterprise, diversity and inclusion, a focus on sustainability or another area of impact:

**Dipalee Jukes, Co-Founder and Co-CEO of Ground & Water Ltd, from London.** The geotechnical and environmental engineering consultancy was founded in 2009. Since founding the business 14 years ago, she now employs 18 people and the business has grown in revenue year on year and finished on just over £2.5m turnover at end of the financial year in March earlier this year, with goals to grow to £5m turnover in the next 3 years and grow to a team of 30. Dipalee is a second generation British Indian, a geologist, engineer, mum of 3, and gender equality advocate working in a predominantly male industry. She's passionate about inspiring and empowering young girls, women, and women of colour into the industry through her involvement in Inspiring Girls UK and hosting the podcast Chai & Chat Engineering to showcase female role models within the industry and inspire others.

- **TECH INNOVATOR AWARD – sponsored by AddIn365** - award recognises a woman who is creating innovative tech which is creating change within industry:

**Marvee-Lisa Booker, Co-Founder & Chief Growth Office at Postworks Ltd, from Northampton.** The pioneering tech start-up was founded in 2015 and is the UK's award-winning platform for sending and receiving letters with sustainability, cost-saving solutions and efficiency at its core. Over the last seven years, Marvee-Lisa's steered remarkable growth and industry disruption, blending innovation with a rebellious brand, growing their turnover from £350k in 2019 to £10 million to date. Beyond business, she's on a mission to empower women at work, using her influence to champion equality and well-being. She is committed to sowing the seeds of identity in other women, helping them recognise their value and worth.

- **BRAND OF THE FUTURE AWARD – sponsored by The White Company** - awarded to the female founder that has recognised where there is a real gap in the market and demonstrates great potential for growth. The winner of this award will receive a mentoring session with Chrissie Rucker OBE, founder of TWC, and also the CEO and other Directors within the business:

**Grace Beverley, Founder and CEO of TALA, from London.** The sustainably made activewear brand was founded in 2020, and Grace has since built her name as a successful female entrepreneur with a global following of 3 million people, is an established speaker and podcast host and was named first in Forbes 30 under 30's retail and e-commerce list at age twenty-three, highlighting her work to accelerate the sustainable-fashion space. Now with 39 employees, in TALA's 3rd year of trading, TALA closed a 5.7m dollar investment round with blue chip venture capital and private equity firms. Grace's first book 'Working Hard, Hardly Working' was an instant Sunday Times No. 1 Bestseller and her podcast, under the same name, has a reach of over 4 million people and hasn't left Spotify's Top 5 in the Business Charts.

- **SOCIAL STAR AWARD** - awarded to a woman who has significantly grown or launched her business using predominantly the power of social media:

**Yanika Cordina, Founder & Director of Cordina Hair, from Poole.** Frustrated with the lack of heatless curling tools that worked for fine hair types, Yanika set about solving the gap in the market herself, using her manufacturing experience from working night shifts in a factory in Malta, in her late teens. Cordina Hair began trading in 2018 and Yanika is now multiple IP owner for her hair curling inventions, Flower Curl and Waver Bun. From gaining manufacturing knowledge Scouted online, Yanika was invited to pitch her hair tools on national TV; Dragons' Den and walked out with a deal. With no college or marketing background, Yanika's online videos reached over 95M views organically, resulting in multiple sell outs.

**Daina Spedding, Investor at BGF, commented:**

"We're delighted to shine a light on these worthy winners. Their resilience, tenacity and determination is even more inspiring given the challenging economic backdrop in which they are operating. It's our hope that by raising awareness of the financial and strategic support available to ambitious founders we can build even more successful business in the future and act as a beacon to women-led businesses across the UK and Ireland."

**Julie Baker, Head of Enterprise and Climate Engagement and Partnerships at NatWest Group, says:**



“The everywoman Entrepreneur Awards are, as always, a fantastic opportunity to come together to celebrate and showcase the remarkable women entrepreneurs who make an invaluable contribution to business and are fantastic role models. I am proud that NatWest is associate sponsor of the Awards and congratulations to all winners and finalists.”

To find out more about the winners or to register your interest for the 2024 awards, please visit <https://www.everywoman.com/entrepreneur-awards/>.

**[ENDS]**

**For more information, interviews, and images, please contact:**

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Or visit our virtual newsroom [here](#).

Notes to editors:

**About everywoman - Powering businesses to achieve their gender inclusion goals**

everywoman is a global learning and development organisation that drives positive change by empowering women to achieve their professional potential. Established in 1999, everywoman works with leading corporations and organisations, improving productivity and performance through its membership offering and unique tailored blend of products and services which unlock female potential and powers businesses to accelerate their gender inclusion goals. As part of its portfolio, everywoman's cross-industry awards and forums have created thousands of female role models and inspired generations of future leaders. For more information visit [www.everywoman.com](http://www.everywoman.com)

**About BGF**

[BGF](#) was set-up in 2011 and has invested £3.5 billion in over 550 companies, making it the largest and most experienced investor in the UK and Ireland. BGF is a minority, non-controlling equity partner with a patient outlook on investments, based on shared long-term goals with the management teams it backs. BGF invests in growing businesses in the UK and Ireland through its network of 15 offices.

BGF is one of the most active investors in women-led businesses. Since 2011, BGF has invested over £420 million in women-led businesses, with high profile deals including nursery chain Kids Planet, global femtech brand Elvie and care service provider The Good Care Group.

In total BGF has backed 57 women-led businesses and is striving to increase that figure further in the coming years. The focus on improving gender diversity is not solely focused on BGF's portfolio. In 2022, women made up 57% of new investment hires at BGF and nearly a third of the non-executive directors and chairs that BGF introduced to portfolio company boards were also women.

**About NatWest**

NatWest Group is a relationship bank for a digital world. We champion potential; breaking down barriers and building financial confidence so the 19 million people, families, and businesses we serve in communities throughout the UK can rebuild and thrive. If our customers succeed, so will we.