



# Mentoring Circles™ for women entrepreneurs



## **Mentoring Circles™: the facts**

- 65 women placed in 13 Mentoring Circles
- Circles met 4 times (3 hours) over 6 months
- Target group: women running a business for under 2 years, or planning to set up within 6 months
- 80% of women succeeded in setting up or growing their business
- Duration of project: March 2007 – June 2008
- Funding body: Business Link South Yorkshire & Yorkshire Forward
- 17% BAME participation

Group mentoring has been successfully used by Inova Consultancy to support South Yorkshire women setting up in business. The Mentoring Circles programme was funded by Business Link South Yorkshire and Yorkshire Forward in a bid to encourage more women to become self employed or to develop an existing business. Women entrepreneurs were matched with successful female business owners in groups of five.

Mentoring Circles™ successfully blend action learning and mentoring methodologies, helping participants to develop the tools they need to think creatively about the issues they are facing. Group mentoring also provides a support network which can be lacking for women setting up in business, who may be working alone at home at first.

Benefits reported by participants in Mentoring Circles™ included:

- Motivation and encouragement gained from sharing issues with a group of women in a similar position
- A fresh perspective on issues faced by seeing things from another's point of view
- The opportunity to learn from the experiences of others
- Improved prioritisation skills, planning goals and reviewing progress within a supportive environment
- Developing practical skills in areas such as marketing and finance
- Better time management, organisation and knowing where to go for help
- Increased self-confidence and focus.



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**Soft skills** – ‘the traits and abilities of attitude and behaviour, rather than of knowledge or technical aptitude’ – have been acknowledged as “21<sup>st</sup> century skills” and are identified by forward thinkers in education, business and government as being key to enterprise and entrepreneurship development as well as underlying many other social issues (Tobin, 2008). Soft skills underpin the hard skills involved in business start-up and development due to their relationship with an individual’s motivation to change, willingness to engage, and enthusiasm for learning - all of which are prerequisites to business success.

### Soft Skills Change of a Female Entrepreneur (before and after participating in a Mentoring Circle™)

