



SYFEN (South Yorkshire Female Entrepreneurs' Network) Mentoring Programme

SYFEN Mentoring Programme:

- Over 100 women involved in Mentoring Circles™ and 1-2-1 mentoring pairs
- 50% set up in business or achieved significant business growth as a result

The SYFEN mentoring programme offered innovative individual and group mentoring for women setting up or growing a business in South Yorkshire, helping over 100 women to achieve their business goals.

Advancing Women in South Yorkshire

From 2003 – 2008 the Advancing Women in South Yorkshire partnership worked towards increasing the representation and participation of women in 3 key areas: self employment, management roles and public life. The programme was funded by Objective 1 and the Learning and Skills Council, with 13 partners from the public and private sectors delivering free courses, training and events for women. The SYFEN (South Yorkshire Female Entrepreneurs' Network) was part of this programme, offering mentoring and networking opportunities to women entrepreneurs. Inova Consultancy developed and managed the SYFEN mentoring programme, helping over 100 women to achieve success in setting up or growing their business. Mentoring was offered to women who had either recently set up in business or were planning to do so in the next 6 months. Women were matched in pairs or Mentoring Circles™ with experienced female mentors, all of whom had been running their own business for at least 5 years and many of whom were trained to Masters level in organizational development, coaching and mentoring techniques.

Mentoring: soft and hard skills *and* a support network

On joining the programme mentors and mentees attended a mentoring training workshop, covering issues such as the expectations that people bring to mentoring, how to get the most out of a mentoring relationship, and how to deal with conflict if it should arise. Mentees were matched either in mentoring pairs or Mentoring Circles™ in which a mentor/ facilitator led a group of 4-6 mentees, with mentoring lasting on average six months and including 4 meetings. Mentees were matched in a mentoring pair or circle using a matching matrix and taking into account various factors including their business, background and experience, aspirations, personality types and group dynamics. The pair or group would work towards clarifying the aims of the mentee, plan a strategy for how to achieve these aims, and review progress. There was a high demand for mentoring and over 100 women benefited from the mentoring programme, with around 50% either setting up their business or achieving significant business growth as a result. Mentees on the SYFEN mentoring programme offered very positive feedback. In some cases, mentees also gained practical skills such as time management or marketing skills from their mentors and peers. In other cases, mentoring had the effect of raising women's self esteem and increasing their self-confidence, enabling them to realise their goals.

Feedback from mentees:

'I have gained an invaluable insight into the process of starting up, managing and growing a business. This has allowed me to identify specific key strategies and measures to create a successful business.'

'My mentor has been a great source of encouragement and inspiration from day one. I found her advice as an experienced businesswoman absolutely invaluable. I am now much more professional and organised.'

'It can be a very daunting prospect when considering leaving full time employment and setting up on your own, but the group was there throughout to keep me motivated and committed to making the business work'

Feedback from mentors:

'The support which mentoring circles offer is unique. It is fantastic to see the level of generous support which evolves as each group gets to know one another.'

'In effect mentoring emerged from the wisdom and experience of all of us working together, and produced a range of options or views for people to consider.'

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