

## Sheffield Adult Learning Café

### Project outline

Develop a 'learning café' for adults exploring returning to learning who may need additional support to understand what is available to them.

### Project Aims

- To engage with adults not currently in education and to reach out to them in a community setting.
- To provide an informal and relaxed environment whereby attendees will feel comfortable approaching us to seek information and advice on Higher Education and the routes/options available to them.
- To provide a range of different ways in which visitors can engage with the information on offer - primarily through one to one, face to face conversations with staff and current students from local HEIs, but also via talks and workshops, information stands and other resources.
- To run a series of sessions over consecutive weeks to allow follow up interactions with attendees.
- That all of the above is planned and delivered collaboratively, with input from SHU, UoS, partner FECs and other stakeholders as appropriate.

### Sheffield Adult Learning Café

We piloted our first Learning Café at The Theatre Delicatessen in Sheffield on consecutive Friday's over a four week period - from Friday 19<sup>th</sup> May to Friday 9<sup>th</sup> June.

The Theatre Delicatessen was chosen as it offered a prominent city centre venue and a great 'shop front' location to help attract people passing by on the day in addition to proactively targeted groups.

The Theatre Delicatessen provided an open plan space to support our model of delivery, was childcare friendly and had the benefit of a staffed café to provide refreshments to attendees (and staff).



## Communication

Promoting the learning café to our potential audience was perhaps the biggest challenge to the success of this project. The working group therefore opted to promote our learning café via a range of channels to maximise interest and attendance.

We produced posters and flyers which were distributed throughout Sheffield at key venues where adults may be likely to attend such as local libraries, jobcentres, colleges, community centres and community venues including the new Google pop-up shop.

HEPP created a Facebook event page for the learning café which was co-hosted by SHU, UoS and Sheffield College and therefore promoted via each institution's Facebook pages as well as HEPPs. Partners also used Twitter to raise awareness of the event.



All partners were asked to identify existing networks and communication channels they currently used to communicate with mature learners in Sheffield. These networks were then used to promote the Learning Café and included Sheffield Learning Champions, NCT, Zest and Matrec.

Adverts were placed in the Sheffield Star and Sheffield Telegraph for the final week of the event.

## Staffing

This project was collaborative and required support from all local partners. Staff and mature student ambassadors from Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Sheffield and The Sheffield College were the primary staffing resource along with advisers from Hallam Union Advice Centre and staff from HEPP. This breadth of knowledge from across the partnership ensured that visitors to the learning café could speak to an appropriate person and have their questions answered.

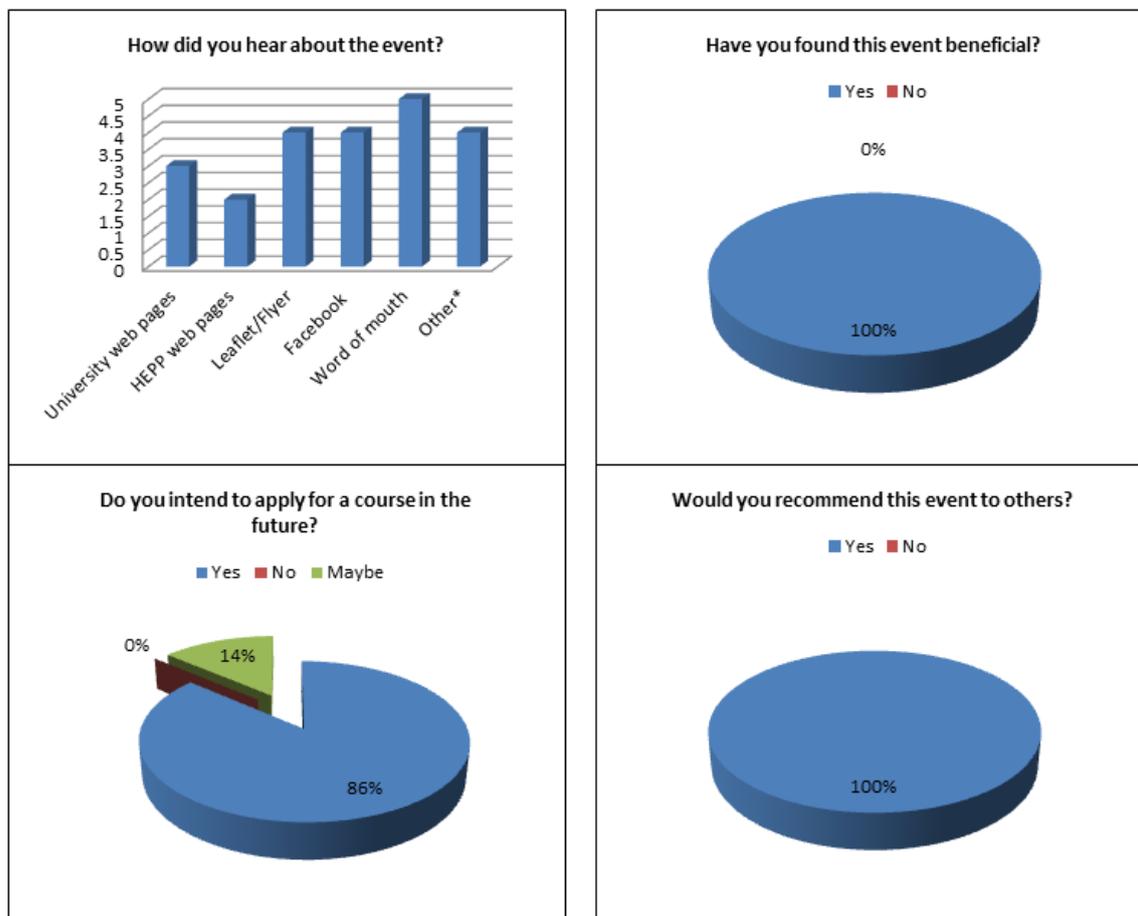
## Resources

University and college staff/students were our main resource as we envisioned that one to one, face to face conversations would be the main way we wanted to engage with our target audience.

The venue had separate areas in which we housed institutional and generic/impartial HEPP materials. We also supplied fun and engaging materials for young children to use while parents were speaking with staff. HEPPs "Pathways" films, featuring mature students from across the region were playing on a large screen throughout all four events.

## Impact

- **48 adults attended** our learning café's over the x4 days
- Of the 22 attendees who completed an evaluation form:
  - **100%** said they found the event beneficial
  - **100%** said they would recommend this event to others
  - **86%** said they intended to apply for a course in the future, with **14%** stating "maybe"



*"Lovely people and very useful. Thank you."*

*"I learned of financial avenues and solutions I did not know I had before."*

*"In depth information and great understanding staff."*

*"Answered all my questions, made me feel incredibly welcome, and would definitely recommend to others."*

*"After chatting to the staff I feel like I can see my options a little more and I'm looking forward to the follow up contact which will help me event more!"*

*"Tailored information about my options with regards to higher education opportunities."*

*"Good place to buy tea!"*

## Future learning

### 'One off' visits vs a series of progressive interactions

During planning, the working group was unsure if the model of hosting the café on consecutive weeks would facilitate repeat / follow up interactions with attendees. The Sheffield pilot indicated that almost all interactions were one off and that a progressive, multiple interaction model was not appropriate at this point.

Linked to the above the attendance pattern of visitors to the learning café programme did not lend itself to a series of talks and workshops. Content/delivery of the learning cafés instead needs to focus on one to one, face to face advice and guidance.

### Staffing of learning cafés

Partners fed back that committing staff members for four consecutive Fridays was quite resource intensive for them, particularly when those dates conflicted with institutional priorities. One potential solution to this would be to deliver a similar number of events, or even more events, over a longer period of time for example every six weeks for 5-6 months.

### Promotion of learning cafés

Promoting the event in advance to targeted groups is critical to the success of the project. Local partners will have a key role in identifying those groups/networks.

Although use of social media was beneficial partners and attendees fed back that hardcopy publicity such as posters, flyers and newspaper advertising had a larger impact on raising awareness of the event.

### Future demand?

Feedback from attendees was incredibly positive (see impact stats). Those who participated found the learning cafes beneficial to them, stated they would recommend such an event to others and indicated that they would be looking to apply for a college or university course in the future.

Feedback from HEI partners attending over the x4 weeks was that the learning café pilot was extremely beneficial to them as a means of reaching out to prospective mature learners who would be unlikely to visit them on campus to enquire about a college or university course.

Although Higher Education was the ultimate goal for the majority of attendees we engaged with, gaining Further Education qualifications would be a necessity for many of them in order to progress. FEC representation was therefore an essential component of the learning cafés and a great opportunity to engage with and recruit mature learners.

### Sheffield College

*"The event proved to be very useful. The majority of queries we had were regarding funding available for adult learners. The second most common query was regarding our access courses.*

*We have received two applications for our access Health Science and two applications for our humanities access course through the event. We expect to get further applications from people who attended once they have decided which course is most appropriate for them. We also had a*

*lot of interest regarding Maths and English GCSEs. Thank-you for organising the event – I think it worked out very worthwhile."*

The University of Sheffield

*"The Learning Café project proved to be a positive and beneficial project for the University of Sheffield's Department for Lifelong Learning and an important part of our Outreach strategy in recent months.*

*It provided us with the opportunity to meet new prospective students, and also a place to direct enquirers and applicants to in order to meet staff from the Department face to face. We will be following up on contacts made with potential students and would expect applications to our courses as a result. We would support the development of this project into a more sustained initiative which could run throughout the year, both in Sheffield and the surrounding areas'*