



# Learning Revolutionaries & the WEA

## Background

In March 2009, the Government launched the White Paper: *The Learning Revolution* ~ a new initiative seeking to foster the development of informal adult learning (IAL). Supported by the Transformation Fund the initiative sought to encourage more adults to engage with learning, particularly adults who had not previously connected with learning. The initiative emphasised the value of people undertaking learning for its own sake rather than for vocational reasons. Further information on the initiative is available at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/further-education-skills/engaging-learners/informal-adult-learning/white-paper> where there is also a link to the IAL Pledge which you are invited to sign.

The Workers Educational Association (WEA) was a successful applicant to the Transformation Fund with the flagship *Learning Revolutionaries Project* which was run in all nine English regions from September 2009. Project funding ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 but attempts are underway to identify new funds to continue and develop what has been a very successful project.

The Project has aimed to recruit, train and support 450 volunteers, known as 'Learning Revolutionaries', to set up Learning Circles ~ small groups of people sharing knowledge, information and skills, learning from each other, in an informal setting, on any topic that interests them.

As a partner in the Project, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) England, worked to find free venues where Learning Circles can meet, many of which have been entered on the searchable database on the project website at [www.joinourrevolution.org.uk](http://www.joinourrevolution.org.uk) which Learning Revolutionaries can use to identify potential meeting places for Learning Circles.

Learning Revolutionaries across England set up a wide range of Learning Circles: Family Learning; Understanding Contemporary Art; Creative Writing; Walking for Health; Conversational French; Cycle Maintenance; Jewellery Making; Writing and Poetry; (read the) Book and (see the) Film; Gardening; Dry Run (drug and alcohol awareness); Egyptology; Assertive Ladies; Carbon Footprint; Digital Inclusion; Community Allotment .....and many, many more.

## Who are the Learning Revolutionaries?

Learning Revolutionaries are drawn from all regions, all backgrounds and all age groups – the eldest is 93! They are people with an interest that they want to share with others and are keen to learn more about. They are not teachers – although some might go on to train as teachers of adults, if they enjoy organising a Learning Circle and they do not (necessarily) have any qualifications as long as they are keen, energetic, good communicators and inspiring!

## Where do Learning Circles meet?

The informal nature of Learning Circles means that many can take place in public spaces and do not always need an exclusive space. Learning Circles are taking place in cafes, pubs, village halls, community centres, public libraries, workplaces, scout huts, and sometimes in the homes of Learning Revolutionaries.

## The London Scene

In London during the funded period, 46 Learning Revolutionaries received 20 hours of training. Some Learning Circles were set up, whilst others remained in the planning stage. As elsewhere in the England, there were a wide variety of topics around which Learning Circles developed. Ideas for Learning Circles in London included:

- Family Learning
- Becoming an Entrepreneur
- Cashflow Club
- Anthropology
- Be my Diva
- Chigirie (Japanese torn paper collage)
- Community photography
- Creativity (Tai Chi, drawing & charcoal marking)
- Digital photography
- Entertainment Skills
- Guitar
- Interior Design
- Managing Pain
- Mental Health Awareness & Survival
- Moving image
- Nutrition with cookery
- Performing arts
- Relaxation Techniques
- Theatre skills
- World dance

Since the end of March, when project funding expired, each learning revolutionary is being provided with a mentor - a WEA tutor - to offer on-going support. The hope is that further funding can be secured, not only to offer continuing advice and assistance to London's new 'army' of trained learning revolutionaries, but to train further revolutionaries to maintain the impetus of a new energetic movement.

## Workers Educational Association

Meanwhile, the WEA in London remains available to parent and other groups wishing to develop adult learning opportunities at street level. The WEA vision is to be the recognised voice of adult learners and the leading provider of adult and community learning in the UK. Courses are offered in response to local community demand and to what students say they want rather than what others think they need. As much as possible, course content is negotiated between students and tutor. In this way, students are placed at the centre of decision-making about their own learning.

For parents interested in developing their own learning alongside that of their child(ren), the WEA organises a number of *Family Learning* courses through local primary schools. To join a course, talk to a teacher or administrator at your child's school to see if they are running such courses. Pick up a leaflet at the school to find out times and details of the course. Similarly, the WEA is active in convening courses on *Community Interpreting* and *Employer Engagement*.

To find out more get in touch with the **WEA (London Region)** at **0207 7426 1950** or [London@wea.org.uk](mailto:London@wea.org.uk)

If you would like more information, please contact Ray Phillips [rayp@lvstc.org.uk](mailto:rayp@lvstc.org.uk) at LVSTC by email or telephone 0845 262 2006 / 020 7538 4309.

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