



Sewing it together

The Sewing Rooms started as a social enterprise to build confidence in women in Skelmersdale, West Lancashire, and now it's a shining example of how one good idea can be replicated in completely new environments



The Sewing Rooms
the-sewing-rooms.co.uk

Reimagining later life

Supporting innovative social entrepreneurs is key to Transform Ageing.

The programme is funded by Big Lottery Fund and run in partnership with UnLtd, the Design Council, the South West Academic Health Science Network and the Centre for Ageing Better. It aims to revolutionise the approach to health, wellbeing and social care for people in later life.

Paula Gamester got the idea for The Sewing Rooms in 2008, when she was working with people with mental health issues, as a business adviser for the Chambers of Commerce. She noticed that the women in the group weren't moving forward with their businesses as fast as the men were, because they lacked confidence.

When she heard IKEA were looking to work with social businesses to make curtains, she seized the opportunity to use sewing to bring people together, boost their confidence, and start something new. The Sewing Rooms now makes curtains for its customers and runs workshops in the store, using any surplus profit to create jobs.

Sewing Rooms tutor Laura Scott is building on that work with our Transform Ageing programme, which is spreading great innovations to new parts of the country. She travelled to the south-west from Skelmersdale to recruit 60 'Silver Sewers' to sew three banners representing the towns of Brixham, Paignton and Torquay. She plans to take the banners to community centres across the south-west to enlist sewers and spread the word. "For the older sewers, it's all about connecting. We do mindful sewing, using it as a way to build confidence and create."

Working with The Sewing Rooms allows Scott to combine her passion for both care and sewing. When newcomers are nervous to try sewing, Scott reassures them with a simple task like sewing on sequins. "People know how to do it, but they get nervous at first." However, before long, participants have forgotten their worries. "People get so enthusiastic and engrossed in it," Scott says. "It's fun and it's friendly and it gives a purpose to their lives." ✪

Ruth Coustick-Deal — Communications Officer, UnLtd

