



Multiply - Beginners Machine Sewing Course

A short course made up of 5x 3-hour sessions where participants developed their practical, everyday numeracy skills through learning to use a sewing machine and creating a soft storage basket and a zippered pouch to take home with them.

Background:

We were very excited to be involved in the Multiply Project and immediately put our heads together to see if we could come up with some creative ideas which would seamlessly incorporate vocational numeracy. Several of our facilitators have had negative experiences with 'maths' in the past, so we felt that we were able to empathise with potential participants and the self-made walls which can immediately appear when people are told that they are going to be 'doing maths'.

We decided that a short course teaching participants the basics of using a sewing machine would fit the criteria in several ways:

- ⇒ Numeracy would be involved in the process in a variety of means including measuring for patterns, calculating fabric requirements, in recognising and being able to draw shapes and within some of the planning aspects of the design.
- ⇒ We knew that that many people have unused sewing machines in cupboards at home, but often they don't have the knowledge or confidence to be able to use them.
- ⇒ With the added pressures of rising costs, we also knew that people are looking to repair and alter items of clothing that they already own both to save money and to be more environmentally-friendly.
- ⇒ Learning a new skill is a huge confidence boost for attendees and as an added bonus, it would be a skill which they could incorporate into their daily lives and also go on to share with others.



The Course:

8 people took part in the course which was delivered over 15 hours. Participants learned how to navigate their way around an electric sewing machine, how to thread, change spools and how to swap needles and sewing feet. Everyone learned how to read, understand and follow simple patterns, choose their fabrics and cut out the shapes they needed. Participants measured and calculated the angles required and learned how to correct mistakes as they happened. Our sessions were designed to encouraged open and curious mindsets, where challenges were viewed as things to work out the answers to and never as something that might cause anxiety or panic.

Each person made, cut, sewed and finished their own soft storage bag which is useful for a multitude of things in the home. One attendee said that her daughter had already claimed the bag before it was even finished! Then, building on the skills gained in the first half of the course, participants went on to make their own handy bag or storage pouch, complete with a zip – which they had to adjust to fit – along with some careful (and accurate) measuring!





Barrier Breaking Funding:

The funding made this project an absolute *delight* to deliver. We had decided to run the 3-hour sessions from 10.30 – 13.30 as this ensured that they would be accessible for parents/carers with childcare responsibilities at either end of the day, and would also work well for some of our more vulnerable clientele, who can sometimes find early mornings difficult to negotiate. Although the times worked perfectly in some ways, there was an issue with the sessions running over lunchtimes as we know people are best able to concentrate and learn when they aren't hungry. Additionally, the rise in the cost of living has made it more difficult for people to be able to make themselves a packed lunch they are comfortable eating in front of others. So we used a portion of our funding to provide hot and cold drinks, sandwiches, fruit and a simple pudding for each of our participants. This worked exactly as we intended and removed a potential barrier for our attendees.

We used the remainder of the barrier-breaker funding to provide each participant with some next steps in their machine sewing journey. Thread Republic are a Kirklees-based group of four textile practitioners, with a focus on sustainability, creativity, community and wellbeing. They currently have a base in the Huddersfield Temporary Contemporary units and as part of their offer, they have sewing machines available to be rented in-situ for 2-hour slots. Each of our course participants received vouchers entitling them to 2x 2-hour sewing machine rental slots at Thread Republic, plus a fantastic bespoke sewing kit (also from Thread Republic) which included a variety of sewing essentials.

On the last session of our course, we walked from our base at Brook Street to the Piazza, where we introduced attendees to Kim Searle of Thread Republic. This helped support participants 'through the door' to their next step, as we know from experience that new people and places can be a challenge for many of the people we work with. In a nutshell, the barrier-breaker funding was hugely helpful in ensuring that our Beginners Machine Sewing Course not only welcomed everybody but also gave tremendous sustainable upskill value to each participant.

Feedback:

"Amazon don't need the money do they. It's people like you that deserve the money to be able to provide courses like this one for people like us!" - MR

"I feel so included by you bringing us here. It's so special to learn about things you might never have known about. I'm so grateful for everything I've learned over the past weeks and the friends I've made." - AE

"My husband didn't believe that I made it! I told him I did and wasn't he impressed. He said it looked like it had come from a shop!" - SO

"This has been lovely. I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to do it all and get it right, but I did! Now I can measure and cut out patterns without being so worried. It's been amazing!" - K