

Coventry's Conversation Cafés

Conversation Cafés run at seven libraries across Coventry. These are informal sessions where anyone can come along to practise their spoken English. They are aimed at newly-arrived communities, including people seeking sanctuary and other migrants.

Participants practise their spoken English and support and encourage one another to improve their pronunciation. Library staff welcome everybody and facilitate the sessions. Staff guide participants to ESOL books and bilingual dictionaries, as well as resources on CD to help improve pronunciation. This enables attendees to further their English skills outside of the Conversation Cafés and any formal ESOL classes they may be taking.

Attendees have also been signposted to Coventry City Council Adult Education and WEA ESOL courses for formal classes to improve their English skills.

Library staff have promoted Conversation Cafés to Adult Education teams, which enables them to refer their clients to local Conversation Cafés.

The Conversation Cafés have been successful in engaging new communities to practise their spoken English and participants have gained in confidence as a result. The sessions have introduced participants to the wide variety of library resources on offer to them, including free membership, specialist ESOL collections and the range of free activities across the city. To some participants the concept of a free, open, public library service is a new experience. Participants have gained in confidence and become aware of other opportunities on offer to them, such as formal ESOL classes, volunteering and job opportunities.

A significant outcome from the work is the variety of new partners that are part of the project. These partners include Coventry City Council Migration Team, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, The Workers Educational Association, Foleshill Women's Training, as well as partners which are also part of the Migration Network Coventry including Citizens Advice, Coventry Law Centre, Coventry University, Warwick University, West Midlands Police, Coventry Night Shelter, Coventry Migrant Women's House, and the Red Cross.

Central Library Conversation Café participants' written feedback:

'It is very good'

'This helped me speak better English'

'I like this group and I want to keep coming'

'Very good group and I have gained confidence'

'I enjoyed having conversations with other people'

'It's really improved my English skills and information'

[What have you gained from this event?] 'Making friends'

'Join conversations improved my spoken English and meet different people'

Samira, from Iran, did not have the opportunity to talk to others before joining the Conversation Café. She says she has learnt new words, as well as getting the chance to practise ones she already knows. Meeting people from different countries at the Conversation Cafés has meant she is more familiar with English spoken with different accents, and this has greatly increased her confidence. As she has had such a good experience through attending the Conversation Cafés she felt able to volunteer at the Library, and now also volunteers at a local organisation supporting women. She has also supported new Conversation Café participants, encouraging a friend to also start volunteering at the Library.