

FROM ACTIVIST TO LIFE COACH

Local life coach **Alison Manning** was an activist in the Women's Rights Movement of the 70s. *Penny Rutterford* met with Alison to find out how that inspired her to offer free coaching to women in Waltham Forest.

Alison Manning credits her lifelong practice of meditation, from her time living in India, for sowing the seeds of where she is today – working as a life coach.

Securing funding from the Emergence Foundation, Alison offers free group life coaching to local women. Having previously worked at The Mill as a volunteer coordinator she recognised it as the ideal venue to welcome women from diverse backgrounds to take part. Alison trained as a coach with the specific aim to work with women but realised that, for many, life coaching simply isn't affordable. And she is committed to providing free coaching for women whatever their background or circumstance.

"I'm passionate about empowering women. Women have made a lot of headway in the last few decades but we've got a lot further to go, and I think that having a safe space where women are able to speak uncensored can liberate them and open them up to a sense of their own potential. That can often be more of a challenge within a mixed group."

The one to one coaching model is possibly more common, but the experience of running group life coaching workshops has converted Alison to their impact. She says "Participants get a lot of support from each other. Take one example. When you hear that you're the third woman who has been made redundant in your fifties, you feel you are not alone, it's not just you facing this issue. It's powerful. Within a group setting you are hearing different people's responses to situations, you are learning from each other".

"I was not expecting that kind of synergy between the group and individual but it's a model that I now feel works better than individual coaching. There's a real variety of backgrounds in each group. You might



get somebody who has been on long term benefits, starting their own business, changing careers, facing retirement. But in the groups we are not focusing on those particular identifiers. We are focusing on confidence and resilience. The learning is on the issue and not your identity. The opportunity to bring people together from very varied backgrounds doesn't happen often. Groups often self select. You're maybe paying for something that's not affordable to everybody which means you find yourself amongst people quite like you. The groups I have been running have a range of people from their 30s to their 70s

with different life experiences. But what they do share is a need to make a change, whether it's getting a new job, a new interest, a new purpose or focus".

At the time of writing, Alison is planning sessions for members of the Hornbeam Joyriders. Subject to her ability to continue raising funds, Alison remains committed to seeking out further opportunities to provide free coaching to groups of women.

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