



“At Xenia, we embrace differences and celebrate with food, culture and creativity.”

Xenia Sheffield Participant

Xenia Impact Report 2023 - 2024



What we do

Xenia is a grassroots women's organisation working towards more welcoming, equal and connected communities. We are based in Hackney and Sheffield.

We run regular Saturday sessions where women from different walks of life can come together to **connect, learn and share as equals**. Sessions are on a wide range of topics often suggested by participants - from heritage to wellbeing, from food to community organising.

At the core of Xenia's approach is our open-door policy. We do not have any eligibility criteria. **All women are welcome**. Participants do not have to commit to attend regularly or let us know they are coming. This allows women with complex needs and changing schedules to access a **welcoming and friendly support network**, when it is useful to them. However, we find that many of the Xenia women come again and again.

Many of our participants have regularly joined Xenia sessions for many years. We have some participants who have been with us since our beginning 2016.

Our story

Xenia began in 2016 as part of the first AntiUniversity Now Festival at Hackney Museum. Founder Theo Cadbury wanted to run a workshop for women from all backgrounds and cultures to come together to connect, share experiences and practise English. Theo was expecting a small group to attend. In fact she was welcomed by a room full of women, who at the end of the workshop wanted to know when the next Xenia event would be.

What started as an experiment, quickly developed from monthly to weekly sessions, run by a small group of local women who volunteered their time to set Xenia up. As part of our programme of sessions we developed partnerships with local arts and heritage groups.

Since the early days, there have been many local organisations and people advocating for us, whose tireless support we have benefitted hugely from. In 2020, the voluntary group set up a registered charity, appointed a board of Trustees and hired a small staff team.

During the pandemic Xenia ran online sessions from 2020-2021 to continue to support participants. We were delighted to return to face-to-face sessions.

In June 2022 we started a Xenia group in Sheffield, run by local volunteers. Originally we ran monthly sessions. In October 2023 we were able to appoint a delivery organiser and deliver sessions fortnightly.





2023-24 IMPACT

HACKNEY HIGHLIGHTS

From April 2023 to March 2024 Xenia Hackney ran 48 Saturday sessions attended by 88 women from 30 different countries. Their ages ranged from 16 to in their 70s. Some women attended a handful of times, while some attended more than 80% of the sessions. Our Trailblazing Women project shaped the focus for the first half of the year, with sessions on illustration, oral history and walking trails. We also ran workshops on health and wellbeing, crafts, LGBTQ+ history and trips to different places and areas in London. We had 6 sessions run by Xenia participants on budgeting, recycling, empowerment, women, dancing and laughing yoga. Surveys completed at the end of 2023 showed participants benefited from the sessions in multiple ways: 86% of participants learning English said that coming to Xenia has made them more confident speaking English; 83% said that the topics we discuss as useful to their life; 82% said they felt more confident and independent; 81% felt more healthy physically or mentally since attending Xenia and 94% said they enjoyed exploring London together.

This year
143
women have participated in Xenia sessions

They came from over
42
different countries

The age range of participants was from
16-75



SHEFFIELD HIGHLIGHTS

From April 2023 to March 2024 Xenia Sheffield has run 17 sessions, running them fortnightly since October. Sessions have been attended by 55 women from over 24 different countries, 25 women have become regular participants. There is a broad age range, from between 16 and mid 70s, and women come from various locations across Sheffield (11 different postcode areas). The sessions are centrally located making it easy for women to attend. The focus of our sessions has been broad, relevant, participant led and creative. Topics have included colour (where a visiting artist did a workshop using natural dyes), memories, fairy tales, food, celebrations, objects and relationships. We have also been working collaboratively with Sheffield Museums and have organised a trip to Weston Park Museum, with further trips planned for other Museums across Sheffield.



CASE STUDIES

These case studies were written collaboratively at a Hackney Xenia session. Participants supported each other in small groups to share their stories about coming to Xenia.

Dorothy's Story

I heard about Xenia from a friend. I felt so excited to have a place to go every Saturday. My reason for coming to Xenia is to learn from the shared stories of other women, to socialise and to stay away from loneliness. The first time I came to Xenia I felt welcomed. I started coming after COVID and I come every week. I enjoyed the sessions on sharing stories, walking, visiting museums and gardens, cooking together and learning new skills. I made new friends at Xenia from different cultures.

My life in the UK has been a little bit bumpy, because it is not what I expected. Before coming to the UK I had heard stories that everyone is rich and you will have everything you need. In reality it is not all green pastures. I have struggled a lot. I like it here because people from all over the world live here. I speak English, Luo and Swahili.

Xenia has changed me in that I am more confident.

Yeasmin's Story

Sometimes I feel happy in the UK, sometimes it's boring. I miss my family in Bangladesh. My husband is really supportive and drops me off at Xenia on Saturday mornings. He knows it helps me to improve my life. Xenia is an amazing group and a supportive community. I meet lovely people in a friendly environment and it keeps my mind free from stress. I want to go on more outings with Xenia and see nature and have adventures. I would also like to volunteer at Xenia to help with childcare support.

Kalkidan's story

I've been coming to Xenia for 3 months. I found out about it from a social prescriber at my GP. At my first visit I enjoyed meeting so many people that I decided to attend every Saturday. I speak Amharic as I come from Ethiopia. I came to the UK 8 months ago because of the civil war in my country. I came alone and I have no other family here. I am studying English at a community centre but I love coming to Xenia to improve my confidence speaking English and in making friendships. I feel happy because I learn something new everytime I come to Xenia. In Ethiopia I had a mini-market. Maybe I could do something similar here one day, or maybe I'll end up doing something completely different - who knows?



QUOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS AFTER XENIA SESSIONS

I learnt a new English phrase "part of the furniture" - I am part of the furniture at Xenia.

Thank you guys. It was a wonderful class full of chat, full of food, full of love, thank you again and love all of you 🥰🥰

Wow! Today! Thank you all. I can't express my happiness. ❤️💛💙



On 9th March 2024 over 70 people attended Xenia Hackney's public launch of our Trailblazing Women map of Hackney. The event was held at the historic Newington Green Meeting House, number 1 of 20 stops on this unique heritage trail, created by Xenia participants, highlighting a selection of women nominated by the community in Hackney.

The public event was the culmination of an Untold Stories project. Xenia participants decided to redress the lack of diversity in the public sphere by recognising the contribution of underrepresented women (migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women, working class women, LGBTQ women, deaf and disabled women). We also wanted to bring local communities in Hackney together by curating a trail which fully reflects the super-diverse demographic and creating a highly participatory experience, including an audio trail available on Spotify and SoundCloud.

During the project Xenia participants developed their skills and knowledge by researching women's stories in partnership with Hackney Museum, Hackney Archives and Newington Green Meeting House. They helped design the map with illustrator-as-historian Kremena Dimitrova, recorded the stories and developed the confidence to speak publicly at the launch event.

The launch was a celebratory event where we heard speeches from nominators, nominees and Xenia women before holding our largest Xenia session yet, where we found out about each other and our relationship with the map.

You can pick up a map at one of our partner organisations or download it here: <https://www.xenia.org.uk/trailblazing-women-trail>

You can listen to the audio trail on Spotify here: [Trailblazing Women - Xenia Hackney podcast](#)



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MAYOR OF LONDON

April 2023 - March 2024

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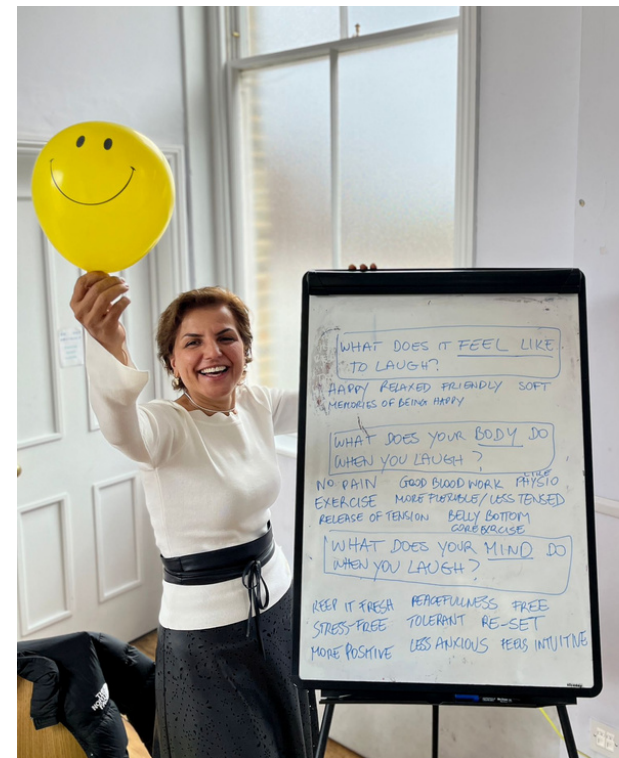


THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Xenia is only possible because of our staff, voluntary organising team members and trustees:

Makena, Camilla, Ioanna, Maya, Amy, May, Nahid, Isabelle, Ivie, Alessia, Jen, Rani, Rosie, Alkyoni, Helen, Laura, Meg, Eve, Iman, Kristin, Ayesha, Millie, Sam, Lois, Natalie, Dawn, Mamataj, Emma, Tashan and Charlene



Big shout out to the community partners we worked with this year:

Hackney Museum, Hackney Archive, Museum of the Home, New Unity, Citizens UK, Hackney School of Food, Hackney Herbal, Sheffield Museum, Sheffield City of Sanctuary

Many many thanks to our funders this year:

Comic Relief, GLA Mayor of London, Maingot Trust, Merchant Taylor's Foundation, East End Community Foundation, National Lottery Community Fund, City Bridge Trust, The Big Give, Michael Francies, Trusthouse Charitable Foundation, The George Cadbury Trust, Hilden Charitable Fund, Another Way

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