Looking for a new direction?
Join the WEvolution today!
WEvolution: A new way of working

The name, WEvolution, suggests a revolution of sorts. It begins with a change in our mindsets to accept people as our equals, no matter what their circumstances. It encourages and inspires those determined to overcome economic and social isolation to start-up and grow their own collective initiatives of change and enterprise. WEvolution is a revolution with a WE at the start and heart of it.

The radicalism of WEvolution’s way of working lies in the very simplicity of its Self-Reliant Group (SRG) approach. The SRG approach is based on two core beliefs: Firstly, women have the aspirations and the resources within themselves to turn their lives around. And secondly, when these aspirations and resources are pooled together in a small local group, there is a greater chance of not only the individual but entire communities benefitting from the pride, change and enterprise that SRGs bring.

The SRG approach is a new way of working with women: a collective and self-starting endeavour to create opportunities for themselves and in the long term, for their families and communities.
Our story began in January 2011 when a group of 13 women from seven communities in Glasgow travelled to Mumbai and Gujarat in India. Coming face to face with grinding poverty and with no safety net or a welfare system to cushion its impact, the group was both challenged and inspired by the confidence and enterprising abilities of the women. By organising themselves into small groups, the women supported each other, saved up small amounts of money, learnt new skills and started income-generating activities. What they saw wasn’t just poverty but resourceful women, working together to find their way out of it.

The group returned home to Scotland, determined to tell the story to others and began Scotland’s first Self-Reliant Groups (SRGs).

The first SRG began in the Provanmill community of Glasgow in March 2011.

What are Self-Reliant Groups?

1. Small in size (from 5 to 10 members)
2. Members from same neighbourhoods and/or similar economic and social experience.
3. Save small amounts of money
4. Common aims and purpose
5. Regular meetings
6. Rotating and collective leadership
Taking the first step

**STEP 1**
Heather and Susan are stuck in a rut and are looking to do something different with their lives and for their families.

**STEP 2**
Together they attend a 3-day training programme organised by WEvolution. Inspired, they seek other friends who, just like them, want a new direction in their lives.

**STEP 3**
They start a Self-Reliant Group (SRG). Together they work towards a better future for themselves, learn new skills and grow their confidence.

**STEP 4**
The group members use their confidence and skills to start up income generating activities.

**STEP 5**
Heather, Susan and their group are no longer in a rut. Together, they have turned their lives around. They share their story with others and encourage them to start their own SRGs. More women, their families and entire communities are turned around.
Discover what’s on offer

1. Group development support
Our first point of contact with women is our introductory training programme where women explore the SRG approach and the elements that go into the making of a strong SRG. Once the training is completed, WEvolution staff provides ongoing support to participants to recruit their friends and neighbours to get their groups started and build a strong foundation.

Using the SRG Training Manual, WEvolution supports the SRG in a discovery and learning process exploring themes like how to work together, manage change and negotiate conflict.

From their very first steps together as an SRG, WEvolution walks alongside as a friend.

2. Skills Development
WEvolution’s Skills Development Programme aims to support women to explore, identify, and build a set of skills that could help them to make some money. We offer creative skills workshops both at the introductory and intensive levels. Our introductory workshops are designed to expose SRGs to new skills that could be used to form the basis of some initial income generating activities.

For those looking to further develop and hone these skills so that they could be turned into self-employment and business opportunities, WEvolution also offers intensive skills training courses.
3. Income generation support
As groups grow more confident, WEvolution supports SRGs to think of possible ways to market and sell their products and services and make some money in return. With staff and mentor support, SRGs receive hands-on support to think through all the aspects involved in income generation. For some SRGs, ideas around making money will come naturally but for others the thought of developing a product or service can be daunting; which is why we are here to help. Once an SRG has a good product or a service, it can either sell it under its own brand or it can use the WEvolution brand.

4. Small group loans
If you have an idea for a small business and want some money to get it off the ground, WEvolution is able to give an SRG small loans of between £50 to £5,000 at a very affordable interest rate. WEvolution has established ‘WeeChange’ – a microfinance fund – ensures that access to capital is not a barrier for SRGs to start income generating ideas or to scale up their ideas up into small businesses. Loans are given out solely on the basis of how well an SRG has been functioning and good group practices. A copy of the loan criteria is available on our website.
After their trip to India in January 2011, Liz and Ellie quickly set to work getting a women’s Self-Reliant Group (SRG) going in their local community of Provanmill in Glasgow. A simple flyer introducing the idea of the new group and delivered to women’s homes locally was a good way to get people along to the first meeting. And since then, there has been no looking back for the group of women that formed the Provanmill SRG. They began a lunch cafe in March 2011 with their first joint savings of £17.

Maureen, a member of the group, explains why she decided to join the SRG: “At first it was because I had the time and I wanted to help get stuff started, but I didn’t want to make the commitment to pay in every week. Now I can’t get away! I really enjoy being involved. The atmosphere in the café is great. It’s fantastic to see people enjoying themselves. A big incentive is that there will be a financial reward at the end of it. Charity work is important but this is not just charity work. We are helping the community and also helping ourselves.”

Jacqueline Crawley joined the group in 2011: “I am a single mother with three sons. I have worked in numerous cleaning jobs which paid minimum wage. In March 2011 I received a leaflet through my door telling me that Liz and Ellie had been over to India finding out about women’s groups and asking if I would like to come along to a meeting and find out what a Self-Reliant Group (SRG) was. I wasn’t sure what an SRG was so I went along to find out. I have been a part of the group since March 2011. I love the friendship and responsibility of being part of the group. My confidence has grown so much. I hope one day to be earning a wage through the SRG. We have run the lunch club for a year now and have started doing ironing and alterations with the hope of opening a laundrette. The women’s Self-Reliant Group is of great benefit to our community.”

In October 2013, a long cherished dream was finally achieved. With a small loan from WEvolution, the Provanmill SRG started the ‘Fluff & Fold’ laundrette for the community!