

# Universal Credit Savvy

Becca Menzies, August 2018

Transforming Notts Together (TNT) has piloted a series of Universal Credit Savvy (UC Savvy) workshop courses, raising awareness of the new working-age benefits.

TNT is seeking to build capacity amongst churches and Christian groups/projects.

The 1-hour UC Savvy workshop covers:

- What Universal Credit is
- The implications of receiving Universal Credit and what the major changes for recipients are
- Where and how to get help with Universal Credit
- How to get ready for the Universal Credit application and interview

The UC Savvy course was developed by the Just Finance Foundation and Transforming Communities Together (Lichfield), which is part of the Together Network.

In anticipation of the full service roll-out in Nottingham in October 2018, TNT has delivered the workshop to 7 charities that work with vulnerable people across the county, including churches, foodbanks, Jericho Road Project and The Friary.



Following the UC Savvy session, organisations are motivated and able to start working out what they or their network could offer to support the most vulnerable during the roll-out of Universal Credit full service.

*“Very helpful course. We need to get planning now.”*  
- Paul Ward, Hope House, Beeston



**82**

people took part in the UC Savvy course during the pilot in Nottingham

**80%**

of UC Savvy participants said their understanding of what Universal Credit is had increased having attended

**87%**

of UC Savvy participants said their understanding of where to get or signpost others to help with the Universal Credit changes had increased

**85%**

of UC Savvy participants said their understanding of how to get ready for the roll-out of Universal Credit had increased

The content of UC Savvy can be worrying, as the impact of some of the changes to working-age benefits could be significant. UC Savvy is designed to highlight what the major changes are, so that charities can anticipate and prepare for the transition to UC; knowing what options are available to help claimants, such as alternative payment arrangements.

*"It was such a helpful overview of Universal Credit and has given us all lots to think about. We'll be in touch with any questions especially as we start planning what we can do to support the women in this before October..!"*

- Faye Sherwood, Jericho Road Project, Nottingham

## Outcomes

**86%** of respondents to an online survey 4-6 weeks later said they had shared what they had learnt with friends and colleagues:

*"I have shared this with families who may be affected."*

*"I have been able to make informed comments on benefits related discussions since the training."*

*"Have shared parts of with a couple of service users."*

*"Within befriending teams at the food bank/ drop in charity that I volunteer with."*

**62%** of respondents to an online survey 4-6 weeks later said that within their community, specific actions had been taken to prepare for the roll-out of Universal Credit:

*"The local food bank is aware of the upcoming changes."*

*"By making preparations for identification documents in readiness for the roll-out."*

*"Contacted DWP."*

**15%** of respondents to an online survey 4-6 weeks later said that they had accessed the UC Savvy resources:

*"We have the leaflets accessible in our community hall."*

*"It's a while ago now but I think I found a link through to the govt doc released in April 2018 which mentioned the fact that you could apply for fortnightly or weekly UC payments."*

## Actions for churches or projects to consider prior to UC roll-out

Some practical actions could be providing **access to IT** or support with IT skills for the online application, and particularly training or **support with budgeting**, as many claimant's budgets will be affected.

Making sure claimants who are engaging with support have **photo ID and a bank account** is an initial step Jericho Road Project are taking, to prevent delays in registering and receiving the new benefit.

## Learning Points

- The course content creates a desire amongst participants to work with and gain insights from other organisations supporting claimants. It has been helpful to **connect** foodbanks that are yet to see the roll-out of Universal Credit full service with those areas in the county that had an earlier roll-out date, for example.
- As Universal Credit full service rolls out in Nottingham Central, Loxley House and Bulwell Jobcentres on 14 October 2018, there will be a need for organisations to work together more intensely.  
For example, the DWP are **collaborating** with the public libraries, the CAB and local charities to collate and share information on IT provision in the city, to enable effective signposting between organisations as an increase in demand for these services is expected during the roll-out.
- TNT can play a major role in **facilitating** networking and communication with key stakeholders for churches and voluntary sector organisations, who DWP are keen to work with, along with social landlords and other partners. The introductory meetings about Universal Credit that the DWP are holding in Nottingham throughout September and October are timely following the UC Savvy pilot, and it will be important to encourage and build from relationships and strategies developed here to ensure a successful transition to Universal Credit full service for the city.

### UC Savvy equips community organisations to help Universal Credit claimants

Newark Churches Together is one of the organisations that attended a UC Savvy session as part of TNT's pilot. Newark is already a Universal Credit full service area as of May 2018, and churches are keen to work together to support the most vulnerable in their town. Leaders commented that the provision of the UC Savvy workshop was particularly appreciated, as staff from the local Job Centre were only able to offer training on Universal Credit to external organisations in their own annual leave.

Following the UC Savvy training, Newark Churches Together have planned to build a support team of potentially 20 volunteers who will be available flexibly during the week to help claimants with their Universal Credit application.

The proposal is for a "hotline" to be advertised, so claimants can call in to request help with the online form-filling. Volunteers will then be contacted to see if someone can arrange to meet with the claimant that week (each volunteer only working with one claimant at a time).

The thought was that a flexible, responsive approach would be more beneficial for this community than a Drop-in that is only open at certain times in the week.

Newark Churches Together are also collating a list of churches in the area detailing what IT, desks or wifi they have available, which volunteers could use with claimants, as well as their own laptops.