



Report on York International Women's Week 2021

The YIWW2021 coordinating team came together in September 2019. It was our first online meeting, and we were clear about one thing: it was important for York to host a 'women's week' to focus on these grim times and to offer us all some hope, and even some fun. We decided on the explicit theme of 'women in a time of plague', and we hoped for events that addressed women's lives in many ways and in many places.

How would the YIWW Programme manage social distancing? We encouraged both online and outside in-person events, though eventually all activities had to be moved online due to the changing pandemic and government rules. Internet sessions were challenging for many organisers and potential participants, and YIWW was grateful to be awarded funds from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to help develop online event technical skills and to offer in-session support. We produced Guidelines that could be downloaded or sent by post, offered online workshops and one-to-one support for both organisers and participants, and in-session support to help events run smoothly.

The Call for Events went out in autumn 2019 via our mailing list, website and social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), and through women's organisations. 17 events came in, and while the number was substantially lower than in previous years we were excited to see what York women came up with to explore the implications of life in a pandemic for women locally and globally, and impressed at the imagination women put into transferring in-person activities into online events.

It was certainly a challenging time. In January - March 2021 we in the UK lived through a critical stage of the pandemic, with very high rates of infections, serious illnesses and deaths, alongside a restrictive lockdown. We were also becoming aware of specific ways in which the pandemic was disproportionately affecting women as a result of gendered patterns of living, for instance through family responsibilities, often alongside paid work; via employment in society-sustaining jobs in caring and grocery; and, for some, being shut at home with abusive partners.

How did we fund YIWW2021? The Programme runs on volunteer work and minimal funding. This year our main expense was technical support, generously funded by JRF. We printed flyers, though due to lockdown distribution restrictions we did not produce our usual 2000+ brochures, so printing expenses were much lower than in previous years. Extra funding and support in kind came from York Human Rights City; the Centre for Women's Studies and the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York; and York Council. Website and postal expenses were covered by individual YIWW coordinators. We are very grateful for this support.

Putting together and publicising the YIWW2021 Programme: All 17 events fitted our Guidelines so we were delighted to accept them all and, in happy coincidences, the individual events rarely clashed. YIWW2021 coordinators designed the Programme, and we sought to publicise this through as many channels as possible, as well as encouraging event organiser to use their own contacts. As we were in lockdown www.yorkwomen.org.uk became the YIWW hub. We uploaded the Programme to this website and offered to post out print copies on request. YIWW coordinators sent out press releases, were on local radio, distributed flyers to local shops and community centres, and used social media extensively. We arranged for flyers to be displayed on as many community noticeboards and local shop windows as possible. Despite all this, our central publicity was only moderately successful, and on the whole individual event publicity was more effective than YIWW promotion.

What kind of events did YIWW bring together? All events were online, in four main categories: Exhibitions / Talks with Q&A / Demonstrations of exercise or craft / Interactive discussions.

We received feedback from 14 organisers. Overall, people were satisfied with their events. The number of participants varied from over four hundred to – in one case – none, although in this case the organisers still want to try again in 2022 with improved publicity. Some organisations attracted new members because of the different reach of online events. Those organisers who had small groups were pleased, and often surprised, by the intimacy that could be achieved online. YIWW core group was praised for technical support, and for regular, helpful communication, although perhaps emails could be streamlined in future! All respondees wanted to take part in YIWW2022.

What did YIWW2021 do well?

- Bringing together hundreds of people, mostly but not exclusively local York women, to discuss, explore and experience aspects of women's lives locally and globally
- Raising money for, as well as awareness of, women's organisations
- Offering (new) skills to people, from candle making to self-defence
- Entertaining people with brass band music and poetry
- Developing guidelines and workshops on managing and taking part in Zoom events, and on video editing. Many organisers took advantage of this support, though the uptake from participants was very low.

What might YIWW2022 do better?

- Listening to and working with as many different constituencies of women as possible in order to expand the Programme offerings and the likelihood of participation.
- Offering technical support via face-to-face workshops (if safe in 2022)
- More extensive and targeted publicity for the Programme.

Questions for YIWW2022:

- If in-person events are acceptable in 2022, should we also encourage online workshops alongside face-to-face activities and if so, how best might this be achieved?
- How might event organisers assess and offer relatively covid-safe in-person events?
- What training is needed to become more proficient in attending to issues of disability with regard to event organising and participation, and designing online and print publicity?
- What do we want from the relationship between York and other national and international organisations? Should all events be organised by York-based people?
- How far should events be opened up to all interested people, wherever they live, and what are the implications and logistics of this?
- Our social media platforms sent out almost daily updates and reports, deliberately staggered so as not to repeat information, and the www.yorkwomen.org.uk website became the hub of YIWW2021, with frequent updates on event developments, yet the publicity for YIWW did not travel far. How can we improve our online usefulness?
- How can we best combine print and online publicity and information?

There are many ways to get involved in YIWW:

- Join the coordinating group. If you have some time and would like to consider joining the informal, friendly group of volunteers who organise the overall programme, feel free to email us for a no-obligation chat. The time commitment is mainly in September, January and March when we meet every three or four weeks. One of the most important tasks is to keep in touch via our internal group email and to take an active part in making ongoing decisions as YIWW comes together. Volunteers also take on various tasks singly or with others, for instance coordinating the Programme or taking responsibility for social media. We welcome all interested people who can spare some time, whether you are new to this kind of volunteering or you have specific experiences or skills to offer.
- Constructive comments on YIWW. Do you have ideas about the future of YIWW, especially in response to this report, or from your participation in YIWW?
- Help with publicity, for instance by distributing brochures in your neighbourhood or disseminating information via social media or in your organisation.
- Offer an event. The Call for Events goes out each September for submission by the following January. If you are not on our mailing list and would like to be added please email YIWW. Or check the website in late September.
- Keep in touch via [Twitter](https://twitter.com/yorkwomen), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/yorkwomen), and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/yorkwomen) or by visiting our website www.yorkwomen.org.uk. The Programme goes live in mid-February each year.

To contact us with offers of help or with suggestions, or for information, email yorkwomensvoices@gmail.com.

Many thanks to everyone who participated in YIWW2021 - see you next year!
Best wishes from the YIWW2021 Coordinating team.