



**YOUNG  
WOMEN  
REMEMBER**

***Oral History Toolkit***

This toolkit is designed as a support and a guide for taking oral history recordings for The Young Women's Movement's Young Women Remember project. Young Women Remember aims to collect, record and share the stories of support, connection and activism linked to our organisation over the past 100 years. As part of this project, the Steering Group (you!) will be taking filmed and/or audio-recorded oral histories from women who have engaged with us in the past, or who have worked or volunteered with us over the course of our organisational history.

## **Oral history - a refresher!**

As a reminder, oral history is the recording and archiving of people's memories, feelings, attitudes, experiences and opinions. It plays a crucial role in democratising, expanding and disrupting the historic record to include a wider range of people and communities. Oral histories are 'history in the community', which at its core, is about the history of ordinary people, and a process in which to put everyone at equal footing in the historical record.

According to our funder, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, oral history is:

"...first-hand evidence of the past. Oral history needs to be recorded, documented and archived to professional standards. Only then can we be sure that recordings will be preserved and made accessible for current and future generations.

It's also important to use these testimonies. Oral histories can be shared as a resource in their own right or as part of the way we explain a museum collection, historic building, community or place."

During our oral history training sessions, we learned that oral histories are a record for now and for the future, and unless we collect and save people's memories they can be lost.

Our discussions found that oral histories:

- fill gaps in historical evidence and secure history at risk
- capture and create a unique historical resource for use in the future
- are often rich in meaning and allow us to explore how we understand our lives and experiences on an individual level but also on broader social and cultural levels
- are interactive sources of history for the 20th and 21st century history - narrators are historical sources that can answer back
- enable exploration of thinly documented and poorly preserved areas of the past
- bring new perspectives and challenge our view of the past, especially with regards to the lived experience of minoritised and marginalised communities
- give voice to people excluded from traditional historical records, or the 'authorised version' of the past, challenging elite and official definitions of what counts as 'proper history'
- document traditions and stories passed down from generation to generation
- record the changing and enduring culture of a place or community, or shifts in everyday life/practices
- contribute to the preservation of dialects and ways of speaking
- at their most powerful, can explain, enrich understanding and encourage empathy with others
- are a retelling of life events – which can help people understand their lives and often contribute to a sense of wellbeing and identity, both for individuals and communities
- can contradict each other - memories can be selective, and interviews capture different viewpoints, often influenced by factors such as age, gender, social status and cultural background

## Taking Oral Histories

You've had specialist training in taking and filming oral histories, and you've practiced together, so have confidence in your abilities! Below is a summary of the practical guidance that we took away from our training with Dr. Alison Chand and media co-op.

# 1. Ahead of the interview

## 1.1 The interview questions

We spent some time workshopping interview questions together and landed on these. Make sure you have a copy of them with you at the interview.

### Question 1 is always this script:

My name is ... and I am interviewing ... for the Young Women's Movement's Young Women Remember project. To begin, please can you tell me your full name, where you're from, and your previous role with YWCA Scotland?"

### Warm up questions

How old are you?

When were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Where have you lived?

What jobs have you had?

What do you do for a living now?

### Contextual questions

What year did you join the organisation?

How old were you when you joined the organisation?

How did you find out about the organisation?

What projects/initiatives did you take part in?

Where were you based during this role/s? (Follow on: Did the organisation have a physical space/spaces? Where did you meet? What was the neighbourhood and community like?)

What was on the YWM agenda at the time?

How long were you involved for?

What did working for the movement look like for you on a regular basis? (Follow on: How often did you meet/get involved? What activities did you do?)

How did your involvement with the organisation interact with your regular life?

What was going on more broadly with the organisation when you were involved? (Follow on: What other initiatives were taking place that you weren't a part of? Were there organisational changes taking place when you were involved?)

What were your relationships like with the other members? (Follow on: Who did you work with at our organisation? What was the team like? Who else did you meet as part of your engagement with us? What were they like? What kinds of activities did you do together? Where men part of the movement at the time?)

What was your reason for moving on from the movement?

Are you still involved with YWM today outside of this interview?

### **Explore questions**

What motivated you to join the organisation / What drew you to the organisation?

What does/did working with the organisation mean to you?

What do you remember feeling about the organisation/opportunity/experience/project at the time?

What were your hopes for the organisation at the time?

How did you feel about your involvement?

What is your favourite memory from when you were part of the organisation?

What did you learn from your time at the organisation?

What opportunities did you gain from being part of the organisation?

Do you think you gained any transferrable skills from your work that you might not have elsewhere?

Did the organisation influence your life outside of the work you do?

What were your greatest achievements while you were part of the organisation?

What do you think were the organisation's greatest achievements / milestones when you were part of it?

Do you feel like the organisation impacted your local community? (Follow on: If yes, how so? If no, why do you think that?)

How did it feel to be part of the movement during that period of time?

Are there photographs or objects from the time that you'd like to share with us?

Where there any major political/social events when you were with the organisation?

Did you feel like you were part of a global movement?

Were there other movements the YWM were involved in or partnered with?

How do you feel about how the movement has evolved?

What impact did/do you feel you have achieved through the movement?

What would you like the future of the movement to look like?

### **“Slightly provocative” questions**

Did you/do you feel like the organisation was/is a feminist organisation?

(Follow up if they say yes: What do you think made it a feminist organisation?

Was it your intention to work a feminist organisation? Was that important to you? How so? Follow up if they say no: Why not? What do you think makes an organisation feminist?)

What challenges did/do you face within the organisation?

## **1.2 Preparing for your interview**

Doing oral history interviews can be daunting, but with the right preparation, you can get the most out of the experience.

- Prepare, but be open to the unexpected

Think about the questions you will be asking, and what you might want to learn from asking them. You can research the person you'll be interviewing on the internet, because there might be topics you want to tease out or explore with each individual interviewee. However, be open to unexpected angles or experiences that may come up during the interview.

- Put your interviewee at ease

The women you will be interviewing might not be used to being interviewed about their lives and may lack the confidence to think that their lives are important. You will discover their lives are more than ordinary, but it might take some convincing on your part by demonstrating that you are really interested and care about their stories. A bit of small talk can also help warm you and your interviewee up before the camera is on. Positive body language like smiling, nodding and making eye contact can help (try to avoid encouraging noises like 'uh-huh' or 'yes' as these will be heard in the recording and might be hard to edit out).



- Practice listening!

You don't need to memorise your questions; you will have them written down to refer to. Rather than practicing the interview questions themselves, focus on practicing listening. Take some time to practice curiosity and active listening in your everyday life. Ask your friends and family members about memories and experiences they've had and be mindful of the points we've outlined above. Ask your colleagues about their weekend, properly listen, and get them to elaborate! There are lots of opportunities in our day to day to get some practice in.

- Hold your judgement!

Some of our interviewees might not share the same political views as you do. Please remember you are there to interview and listen, not to judge or pass comment on anyone's views. At a later stage, we will decide what we want to include in our archive and how we archive such material. The most important thing you can do in this instance is to listen carefully and have someone to speak to afterwards if anything difficult comes up during the conversation – we are here for a chat about it if you need it. See more on 'challenging content' in section 1.5.

### **1.3 Interview Setting**

Ahead of your interview, we will coordinate your interview location for you. A good place to carry out your interview is in the home of the person you are interviewing (if you and the interviewee are comfortable with this). Homes are likely to be quiet and where the interviewee is most relaxed in their surroundings. They may also have photos and other objects at home to share with you too. If this isn't possible, we will find an appropriate alternative.

### **1.4 Interview Timings**

The interviews themselves will be up to two hours each, however you should allow plenty of time for the interview appointment overall and ahead of it. You need time to travel to the interview location, get set up and have a chat before you film anything. You might need to take tea and bathroom breaks during the interview, and you should always leave a bit of time at the end of



the interview to speak about the interview, form signing, and express your gratitude to the interviewee for their time and their stories. For this reason, you will not do more than one interview a day. Oral history interviewing is a really special experience, but it can also be tiring. You also want to give each interviewee your full attention and energy.

## 1.5 Personal Safety

Most of the interviews will involve visiting women you don't know in their own homes, so it's worth thinking about your personal safety and how to look after yourself before, during and after each interview.

- Work in pairs

You will always be conducting each oral history interview in pairs – one asking the questions and the other focusing on the film and audio recording aspect of the work. This is helpful for conducting high quality interviews, but it's also a way to look after yourself and each other.

- Let someone else know when and where you'll be

The Heritage Research Coordinator (Samar) will know where you are meeting, what time you are expected there, and what time you are expected to return home. Samar will also have your telephone number, and the telephone number of your interviewee and the address of where you are visiting them.

- Stay in touch

Take your mobile phone and phone charger with you to your interviews. Once you are on your journey home after your interview, let Samar know by text, WhatsApp or email.

- Plan your journey well

Make sure you are happy with your travel arrangements to and from the interview location. Make sure you know which train or bus to catch, at what time(s), and what journey you might have to take on foot from your public transport stop to your destination. Check the timetable, because even in large cities bus services can be unreliable, especially in the evenings and at



weekends.

- Know your interviewee

If you have not met your interviewee before, make the effort to check that they are who they say they are. The day before the interview, we would recommend that you call your interviewee to confirm that the interview is still good to go ahead, and to build rapport. This can help you feel confident in who you are meeting, and make the interviewee feel more comfortable too.

- Trust your own good judgement

If you feel uncomfortable for any reason when interviewing someone or visiting them in their own home, trust your instincts. You are in no way obligated to stay - make an excuse and leave.

- Prepare for possibly challenging content

Although it's not always possible to anticipate what an interviewee might say or how it might affect you, it's helpful to be prepared for possibly challenging content in case it does come up. You can do this by establishing what sort of support you might need if negatively affected by what you might hear. Preparing a self-care plan and some decompression activities for after your interview goes a long way – some oral historians find that mindfulness activities and physical exercise such as a walk or yoga can help to 'process' a difficult interview and put it into perspective. Identifying a family member or a friend who you can talk to about your emotions and reactions after an interview is also key.

## **2. Conducting your interview**

### **2.1 Getting Ready**

The more organised you are in getting ready, the more confident you'll be in the interview, and the more comfortable your interviewee will be.

Before you leave home, check you have everything you need:

- Your full filming kit (and that everything is charged!)
- List of questions and (optional) interview prompts
- A digital copy of your recording agreement
- Information sheet to explain your project
- Full name, address and contact number of your interviewee
- Pen and paper
- Mobile phone (this should be off or in flight mode during the interview)

Avoid wearing jewellery, clothes or shoes that make a noise when you move and will be picked up on the recording.

## 2.2 Setting up

If you are at the interviewee's home, ask them where they would be most comfortable being interviewed (living rooms are usually best for comfort and sound), and where they would prefer to sit (e.g. favourite or usual chair).

If they offer you a drink, don't be shy to accept it – this can help build the relationship between you.

Set up your film equipment and do a short film and sound test before you start the interview to check everything is working well. Film a short bit of dialogue and then play it back to help you to check if there is any background noise.

Give the interviewee some information about the project and how the interview will go. Some things you might tell them are:

- You will ask them to sign a recording agreement at the end of the interview
- Not to worry if their phone rings or you are interrupted – you'll just pause filming
- That you might glance down at your notes occasionally to get ready for next question
- That they can stop at any time, and that you will both take a 'comfort break' halfway through

- That the camera and mic will be on unless they request to stop the interview
- You are happy for them to tell you something in confidence “off-the-record”

Before you start filming, ask if they have any questions. Once you and the interviewee are ready to go, jump right in!

## 2.3 Taking the interview

After a bit of small talk, let the interviewer know that you are about to turn on the camera/start the audio recording and that you’ll say a small script to start, and not to worry too much about it, because after that point you’ll have a relaxed conversation. You can also let them know what the first question will be, to put them at ease.

Start with basic information about the interview. Think of this as labelling the interview recording. We suggest you start your interview by saying the following:

“Today is [today’s date].

My name is ... and I am interviewing ... for the Young Women’s Movement’s Young Women Remember project. To begin, please can you tell me your full name and your previous role with the Young Women’s Movement?”

You can then go into your interview questions (for your interview questions, check 1.1), which you can go through chronologically, or by topic as themes arise – but do make sure to try to get through all of them. Be careful to manage your time properly and be aware of how much time you need to dedicate to each topic or area of interest. Each interview is about two hours long, and in some cases, if the interviewee is consenting, you can go back for a second interview (but don’t bank on this)!

Based on the responses you receive; you can continue the conversation with follow-up questions. Try your best to use ‘open-ended’ questions (no one-word answers!) and encourage the person to explore, evaluate, or to reflect



on how they felt at the time and after. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification and confirmation of specific details, such as dates and names. In general, questions should be neutral in tone, rather than leading – you can avoid this by avoiding questions loaded with value-laden terms. And don't be frightened to raise difficult topics so long as they are dealt with carefully and sensitively.

Examples of neutral open-ended questions:

Explore: Can you tell me more about that? Why was that?

Evaluate: Was that typical? What did you think about that at the time?

Emotion: How did that make you feel? How do you feel about that now?

It's okay if the interview wanders away from the topic you asked about - sometimes this can lead to surprising or unexpected insights into the past, so don't interrupt them mid-flow. However, if you find that the interview has reached a dead end or is wandering too far from your main themes, wait for a natural pause to bring the person back on track by returning to something they said earlier or by introducing a new question.

By doing some background research on your interviewee, you will have more of an understanding of context and will be able to ask more informed follow-up questions, but don't get too hung up on this. If it's helpful for your confidence, you can prepare a short bullet point of topics for your follow up questions, but don't add a list of questions, or you risk making the interview unnatural, stiff or stilted. Being genuinely curious and engaged during the interview can produce some of the best and more natural results – you are clever and come with your own life perceptiveness, own that!

## **2.4 Closing the interview**

At the end of the interview, ask the interviewee if you think you've covered everything or if there's anything they'd like to add.

When you're done interviewing, thank the interviewee and give them positive feedback. Ask them to sign your agreement, and answer any questions they

might have about consent, anonymity, and how their filmed interview/audio recording will be used. Let them know when you'll be in touch to follow up with them.

### 3. After the interview

Now that you've completed your interview, you're ready to process the oral history material you've created.

#### 3.1 Securely storing documents and files

A successful oral history project keeps a record of all the documents, files, recordings, and information that is produced throughout the process. The signed recording agreements must be kept safe otherwise we won't be able to use the oral history interviews in any public capacity, or deposit them in an archive. Store the signed copy of your recording agreement alongside the video files it's connected with.

It is also vital that your film and audio files from each oral history interview are securely stored and easily accessible. The safest way to protect your oral history interviews is multiple copies, in multiple formats in multiple locations. During our training with media co-op, they explained how to store our files securely. To avoid the risk of losing, deleting or damaging unprotected files you should take the following steps to back them up:

##### Video Files

1. Log into your email on the iPad to find your electronic copy of this toolkit in your inbox. Click on this [link](#).
2. Create a new folder - titled by your name and the date
3. Open the folder and press +NEW
4. Select UPLOAD VIDEO
5. It will take you to PHOTOS. Select your clips and press OK.
6. When you're done uploading, change the name to YEAR MONTH DAY NAME LAST NAME of the contributor.
7. Email Samar to let them know that your footage is there and the name of the file and folder.

If someone doesn't want to be filmed, then we use the audio recording app.

### Audio Files

1. After the recording, click and hold on the file name NEW RECORDING until it allows you to change the name to YEAR MONTH DAY NAME LAST NAME of the contributor.
2. Click three dots that are at the top of the screen, in the middle. Next to the bin.
3. Click SHARE
4. Select SAVE TO FILES
5. Select ON MY IPAD and click SAVE (top right)
6. Log into your email on the iPad to find your electronic copy of this toolkit in your inbox. Click on this [link](#). Create a new folder, name it and select +NEW, then FILE UPLOAD then CHOOSE FILES.
7. Navigate it to ON MY IPAD and select the correct files.
8. Email Samar to let them know that your recording is there and the name of the file and folder.

**IMPORTANT: For both video and audio interviews, please upload the signed digital recording agreement to the corresponding folder.**

Rebecca and Samar will then download the files and back up on hard drives.

## 3.2 Interview summaries

It is a good idea to write a summary straight after completing an interview, perhaps on the train or bus home. The sooner you do it, the more of the interview you'll remember for the summary.

The summary should include basic facts about the interview, such as who you interviewed, where and when it happened, and how long it took. You should include any notes you made during the interview, such as topics, keywords, dates, events, and biographical details. You can also add your own thoughts on how the interview went, how useful it was, or whether anything surprising or novel emerged. The summary allows you to think about how well you did as an interviewer and come up with ways you can improve your

skills in future interviews or projects.

The purpose of the summary is to help with analysing and archiving the interview. The more detailed and descriptive the summary is, the easier it will be for the Young Women Remember project and future researchers to use your oral history interview recording.

Once you are done writing your interview summary, please upload it as a word document to the folder where you have saved your corresponding video or audio file. Then let Samar know you have uploaded it so that they can backup the file.

# NOTES



# NOTES

***THE YOUNG  
WOMEN'S  
MOVEMENT***

