

# WOMEN UNLOCKED

## Pilot Report



October 2025



**LEADERS  
UNLOCKED**

# ABOUT WOMEN UNLOCKED

Women Unlocked is a diversionary mentoring project engaging young women, aged 16- 24, exposed to or at higher risk of exposure to Gender Inequality and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), including those from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds. The project utilises mentoring and skills training to empower young women in various areas, including in both personal development and in tackling gender inequality.

The project focuses on both individual mentoring to support participants to reach personal goals, as well as whole group development days and close work with partner organisations to build teamwork and interpersonal skills and to come together to discuss key issues and solutions relating to gender inequality and VAWG. This included developing a county-wide VAWG campaign aimed at improving reporting of VAWG incidents.

With funding from the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority (Y&NYCA), a pilot project ran in York and North Yorkshire from January – October 2025. This report reflects on the Women Unlocked Pilot and its successes.

## Introduction



## ABOUT THE GROUP

Engaging with a diverse group of young women, with different backgrounds and experiences was a priority for the project. The Women Unlocked pilot worked with 15 young women, of which:

- 20% identified as LGBTQIA+
- 40% identified as being from a minority ethnic group
- 33% identified as having a disability
- 7% identified as not in education, employment or training

## Introduction





# PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the project, every mentee took part in one-to-one virtual mentoring sessions. These sessions followed a structured programme supporting mentees to develop SMART goals and goal pyramids throughout their Women Unlocked journey. As well as tailored content to build skills and confidence in areas requested by mentees.

Topics covered in individual mentoring sessions focused on supporting participants to develop a range of soft skills and to build confidence in themselves and their future. Exercises included interviews, CV & application reviewing, research skills for deciding next steps, and public speaking and confidence building.

## Individual Mentoring





# IMPACT

Mentee's were asked to complete a survey at the start and end of their mentoring journey. Here are some of the key impacts of the project:

“ It created a safe space for women to share experiences and support each other ”

“ The last 8 years of my life have been controlled by my social anxiety/mental health and this has been my first big step into facing that. ”

**Mentees self assessed confidence in themselves and their own abilities:**

- **Average start rating: 3.4**
- **Average reflection rating: 4.5**

**Top skills mentee's identified has having gained on the project:**

- **Confidence**
- **Teamwork**
- **Communication**
- **Creativity**

# Individual Mentoring

## *HEAR FROM OUR PARTICIPANTS*

**“It has been fantastic, and you've created such a fun and safe environment to work together on a really important issue. And also to Amber for being an amazing mentor, you are very relatable and your energy always made me feel excited to work on my goals - and I definitely wouldn't have decided to do this on my own! I'd like to say thank you to you all as well for making this such a welcoming environment”**

**“The mentoring sessions have been really wonderful and I can't wait for our next call in a couple of weeks. I already feel more confident and prepared to put myself forward for more roles and apply to new things.”**

# **Individual Mentoring**



## GROUP DEVELOPMENT

As well as individual mentoring, Women Unlocked participants took part in four group development days across the project. These days included team building and opportunities to develop confidence, and interpersonal, and leadership skills.

## WORKING WITH PARTNERS

A key element of our group work included working closely with partner organisations, such as the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority and North Yorkshire Police to provide a lived-experience sounding board and critical friend to advise on VAWG issues.

Over the course of the project our partnership work

# Group Development Days





involved:

- Inputting on the York and North Yorkshire Deputy Mayor for Police, Fire and crime's new VAWG strategy
- All About Respect Consultation
- Advising the Police VAWG Sargent
- Advising the Police Race Action Plan Team
- Working with IDAS (Independent Domestic Abuse Service)
- Trialling and reviewing Stop Hate UK's 'Start Safe Stay Safe' reporting app.

# Group Development Days





# VAWG CAMPAIGN

To establish a wider reach for the project, participants also utilised group development days to design a peer-led VAWG campaign. The campaign topic, of 'reporting' was chosen by participants as an important issue needing to be addressed.

The group decided to create a two-tier campaign, starting with designing a 'professionals education pack' detailing, through lived experience, the barriers young women face when reporting VAWG, and how professionals can work to reduce these. (Appendix A)

The group then attending the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Partnerships 'Designated Safeguarding Lead' conference to promote their education pack

amongst professionals.

The group also developed a short-form video aimed at encouraging their peers to report VAWG and raising awareness of different reporting methods, including using Stop Hate UK's 'Start Safe Stay Safe' reporting app, which has newly launched in York and North Yorkshire with support of the Y&NYCA.

You can view the VAWG Reporting video here:  
**<https://tinyurl.com/ye8cppe3>**

## Group Development Days



## *HEAR FROM OUR PARTICIPANTS*

**“The Women Unlocked Mentoring Programme has been truly eye opening, and it’s been incredible to have hands on involvement in making the world a better, safer place for women and girls.”**

**“The project has been such a joy to work on. It has given me a much deeper understanding of the issue and has definitely made me more passionate about bringing change to our current systems. It has been such a privilege to collaborate with this amazing group and hear about everyone’s own experiences.”**

# **Group Development Days**



## **HEAR FROM PARTNERS**

**“The inclusion team at NYP worked with Women Unlocked to discuss how intersectionality, race, gender and culture can make a huge difference to how people are perceived and their life chances. The fantastic group of women provided great personal insight and have directly influenced how some of our Police Race Action Plan actions are delivered. Seeing how they have developed from our first meeting to the final development day was truly inspiring.”**

**North Yorkshire Police**

**“It has been a pleasure working with this brilliant group of young women. It is vital that we listen to the voices of local women and girls, and the Women’s Unlocked groups feedback, views and insights will directly inform the work to address Violence Against Women and Girls in York and North Yorkshire. Their passion and enthusiasm to improve the lives of women and girls has been inspiring.”**

**York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority**

# **Group Development Days**



## *IN SUMMARY*

Women Unlocked has aimed to empower young women, in relation to VAWG but also wider issues of gender inequality and discrimination, such as within their education and employment, in order to overcome gender-based societal barriers.

Through individual mentoring, group and partnership work, 16 young women have gained confidence and new skills to improve their future and reduce risk of victimisation.

The two-tier reporting campaign, designed by Women Unlocked will enhance knowledge and confidence in reporting VAWG and ensure a wider positive impact for girls and young women across York and North Yorkshire.

## Conclusion





## COMMUNICATION

"After women and girls have reported violence against women and girls (VAWG), they are often not given clear communication on time frames for when action will be taken. This means they are left with a lot of uncertainty about their security, both short-term and long-term. In the meantime, crucial resources and support services are not being shared with the victims; these are essential.

Instead, in order to reduce the barrier between authorities and victims, we believe that any report should be immediately responded to with a resource pack that can direct those in need to support services, local community groups, helplines, and the organisation's own wellbeing lead. Simple communication is reassuring; it lets the person know that their report is being taken seriously, even if they don't use this information. Finally, a timeframe for when action will be taken not only comforts the victim but ensures that authorities take an active stance in the matter, which stops them from forgetting the seriousness of violence against women and girls."

## CONSIDERATION

"When engaging with victims of violence against women and girls (VAWG), it is crucial to recognise that many may experience intense nervousness or anxiety when speaking out. This can stem from trauma, fear of not being believed, or concern about potential repercussions. The absence of a safe and trusted environment can further silence victims, especially when they do not feel comfortable with the individuals they are speaking to.

We must provide a safe environment. Where possible, providing access to trained female officers (or teachers/ support workers when not reporting to police) can significantly enhance a victim's sense of safety and willingness to disclose sensitive information. Building trust and ensuring a compassionate, trauma-informed response is essential for practical support and justice."

SCAN FOR  
SUPPORT  
SERVICES



## Improving Reporting for Women and Girls

Made by the women of **WOMEN UNLOCKED**

## SPEED

"We believe that one of the biggest barriers to reporting violence and accessing support is the slow pace of responses. After making the difficult decision to speak out, they are often left in the dark, with no clear date or understanding of what they're waiting for. This is the case with both authorities and support services. This lack of communication creates stress and fear during an already unsafe period. For those who need further support, it can feel like their lives are on hold, reduced to just another case on someone's list.

To tackle this, we need clear timeframes from the start, such as hearing back within a month and regular updates if progress is delayed. Services and authorities must communicate not only with each other but also directly with the women involved. Quick, clear, and consistent updates would reduce anxiety, help build trust in the system, and show young women that their voices are heard and their safety truly matters."



## DISCREETNESS

"It can be really stressful when your privacy is not respected. For example, if the police come to your house in full uniform, it might attract unwanted neighbours' attention. Similarly, when teachers discuss something that was meant to be private, it might feel like a betrayal. These small things might be unintentional, but they can prevent young people from asking for help and lead to further distrust in the system.

To keep things more private, police could wear plain clothes or use unmarked cars when visiting victims' houses to ensure confidentiality. In school, teachers should be trained more on how to handle personal information they receive with care. The sensitive information should only be shared with someone's consent, unless there is a safety concern. Being discreet shows respect and helps young people feel safe when they speak up. Small, thoughtful changes can make a big difference in building trust and supporting victims."

## ACCESSIBILITY

"Young women are often not aware of 101, online reporting options for VAWG, such as the Start Safe Stay Safe App, and what the process involves. Additionally, many incidents are commonly viewed as not "serious" enough to warrant reporting or receiving support. Those with communication difficulties or in an unsafe environment may also feel unable to access these services, due to being unaware of reporting options, such as a live chat with police.

To improve this, as part of the education on support relating to VAWG, implement live demonstrations in secondary schools to show how the reporting process works, and provide opportunities for students to talk with specific staff members who can champion reporting.

Place step-by-step leaflets on VAWG reporting with police contact information (e.g. live chat, 101, and Start Safe Stay Safe) in discrete locations, like bathrooms in GP offices. Accessibility can be enhanced by improving services such as the North Yorkshire Police live chat."





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