

YSWN

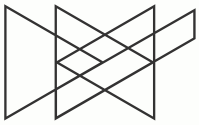
phf Paul Hamlyn
Foundation

Permission **to Play**

▷ How feminist sound collectives can support women and people of minority genders' participation in sound and music technology.







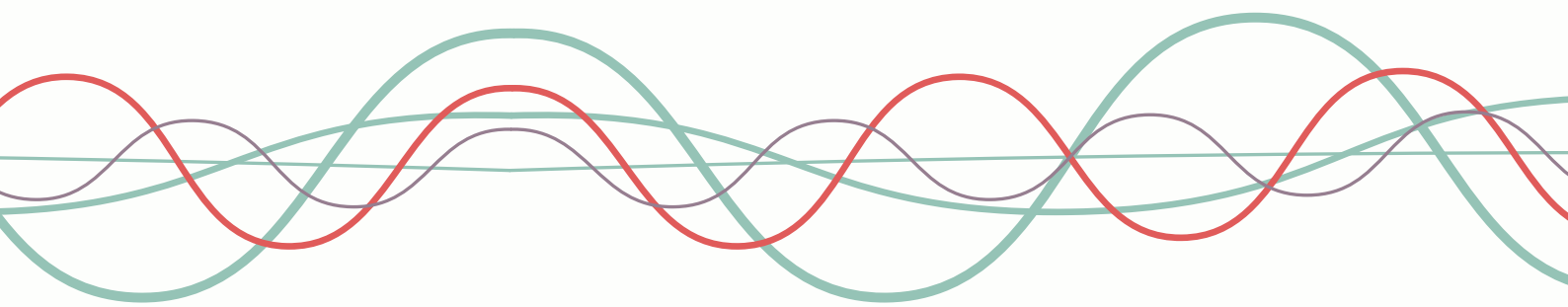
YSWN

Yorkshire Sound Women Network (YSWN) enables the artistic and technical development of women and people of minority genders through access to resources, skills-sharing, and creative opportunities.



Permission to Play (PtP) was a two-year programme intended to improve access to participatory music technology activities for women and people of minority genders in the North of England. It was funded through Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Arts Access and Participation Fund.

Electronic music production, music technology and DJing are overwhelmingly male-dominated and YSWN saw a clear need to redress this imbalance. Previous work had demonstrated that where women and people of minority genders are empowered to engage with technology, and are given safe spaces to take risks, they do so brilliantly. PtP aimed to shift power and address these inequalities by empowering the development of regional grassroots feminist sound collectives.



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Why regional sound collectives?

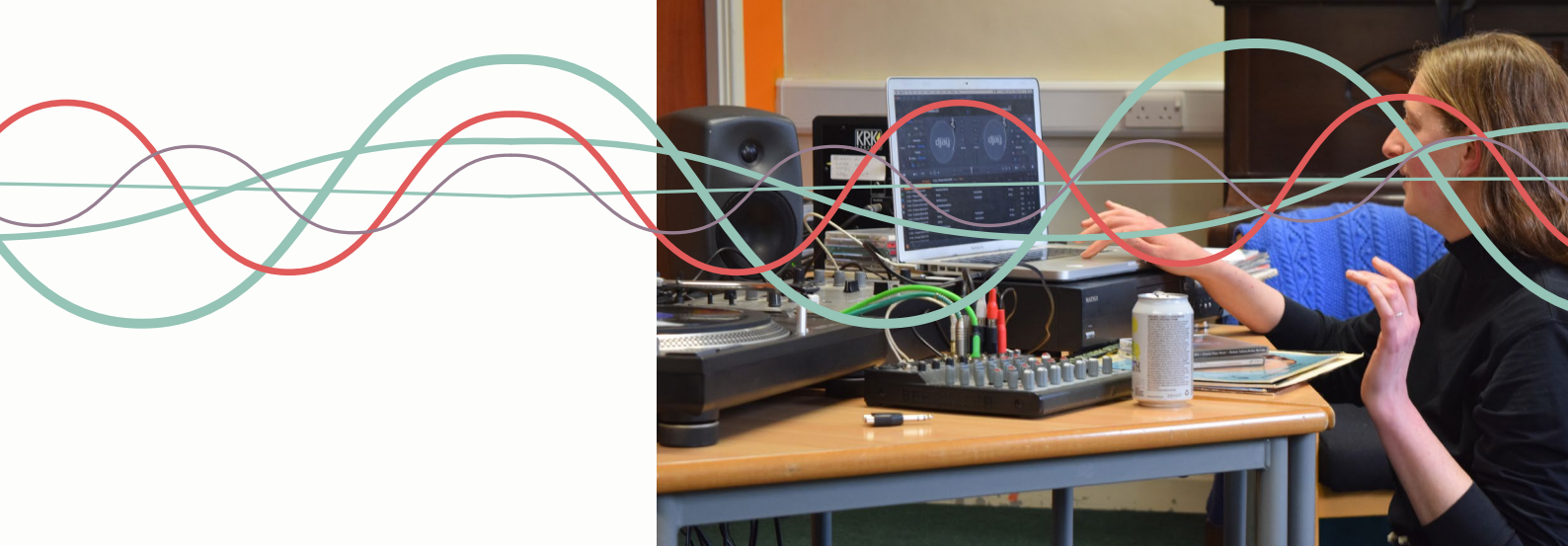
YSWN regional groups are independent collectives of women and people of minority genders who share YSWN's values but are free to self-organise group activities according to their own needs and interests. Through PtP, groups were offered opportunities to build their capacity through a bespoke programme of mentoring, professional development and artistic commissions. Groups were also provided with financial support to diversify their activities and pay group organisers for their time.

The project helped to further develop existing regional sound collectives in Huddersfield, Calderdale and Sheffield, and nurtured new groups in Wakefield, Bradford, Derbyshire and the North East. Over 40 events were delivered during the project, reaching 175 participants. Thirty-three women and people of minority genders were paid to lead activities. These included crafting DIY radios and preamps; collaborating to create collages from looped records or a multichannel installation from field recordings of the Yorkshire coast; picking up creative and technical tips from artists such as NikNak; teaming up with Kirklees Year of Music for the HERD audio sculpture project, and much more.

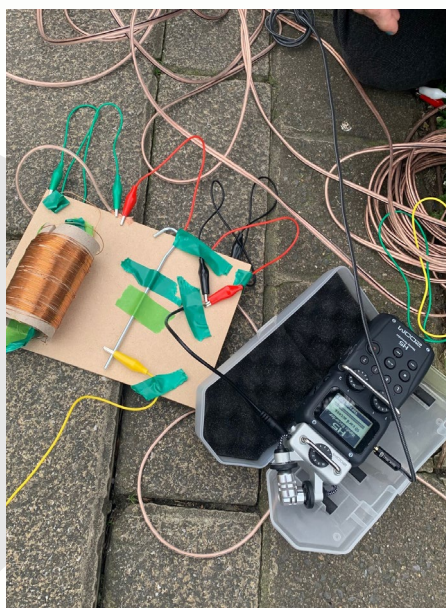


Over 40
EVENTS

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Evidence gathered during PtP shows that this approach:

Boosts confidence.

Supportive, peer-led activities created a safe space for participants to experiment: “I felt comfortable asking even the silliest of questions. Everyone treated me with kindness and patience even though I was new and I struggled to understand technical things. I left feeling much more confident in sound and technology.”

Enables women and people of minority genders to develop new skills or build on existing ones.

This included technical, musical, recording and production skills alongside personal development and skills such as mentoring. YSWN’s inclusive approach enabled both those new to music technology and those with more experience to benefit and learn from each other: “It helps to realise what you know when you have discussions with other people, and it’s great to learn new things from others too.”

Creates a supportive community that helps foster creativity.

Meeting other women and people of minority genders involved in sound and music technology helped validate individuals’ creative practices, provided relatable role models and reduced isolation: “It’s hard to work alone for too long, so better to be in a community with others.” The local nature of the groups helped tackle some of the barriers around accessibility.

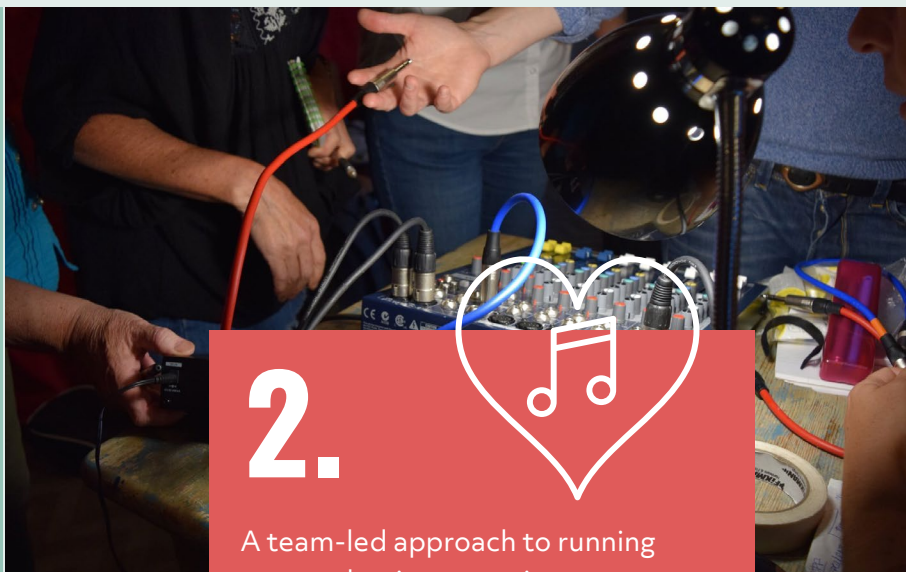


What are the ingredients for success?



1.

An inclusive, non-hierarchical group structure that facilitates safe spaces for experimentation and discovery. This supportive ethos based on YSWN's Practice Principles differentiates the collectives from mainstream music technology groups.



2.

A team-led approach to running groups that is responsive to group members' needs and interests. Sharing responsibility provides the flexibility needed for those with caring responsibilities, disabilities and work commitments to participate.

3.

A mixture of social events and structured workshop activity with hands-on opportunities to play with technology. "It was like a knit and natter, but for electronics!"

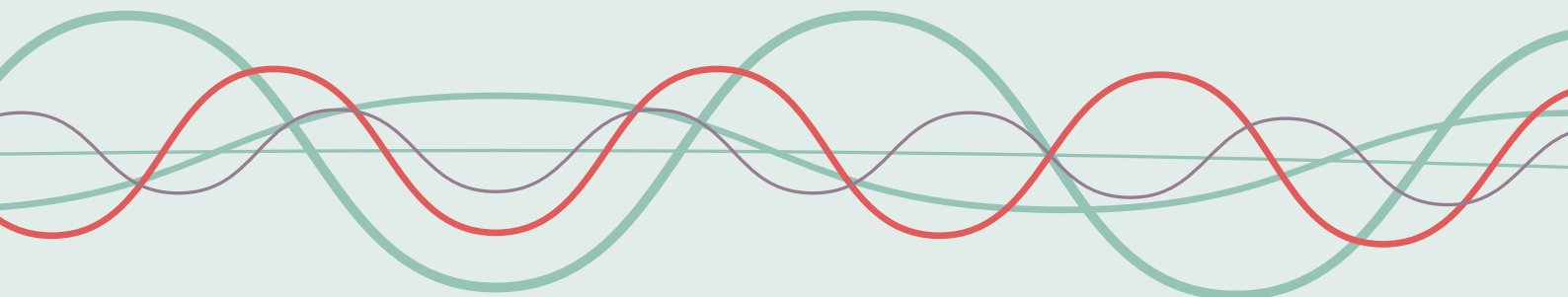
4.

A balance between online activity that enables people from a wide geographical area to participate, and local opportunities to meet and be inspired by other women and people of minority genders.

5.

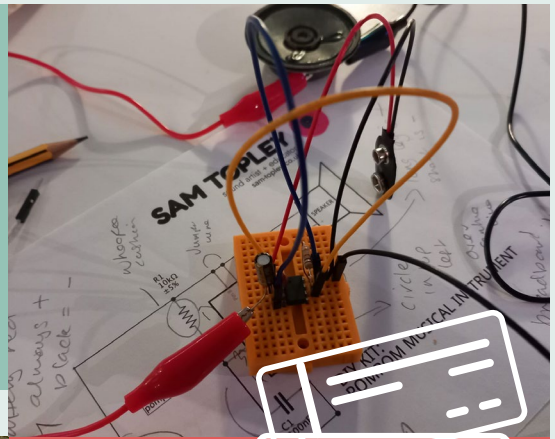


Access to opportunities such as artistic collaborations and paid commissions to help nurture creative practice.



6.

Use of a range of different communication methods to inform people about group activities, as there is no “one size fits all” solution to this.



7.

The use of accessible venues that are appropriate for the group's target audience.



8.

Setting up mechanisms for sharing knowledge between and within groups, such as through mentoring, peer to peer skill sharing and engaging with women and people of minority genders from a range of different backgrounds and experience levels. A network of regional sound collectives could enable groups to continue to learn from each other, and share training and resources.

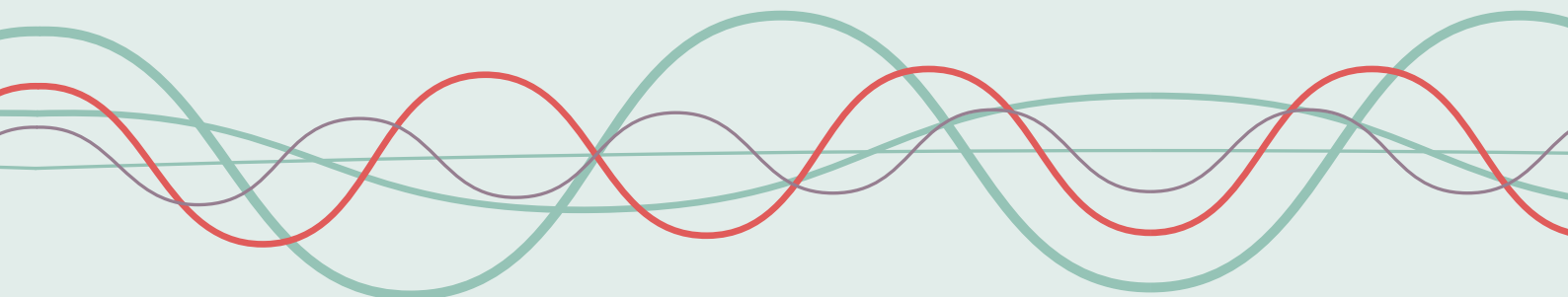


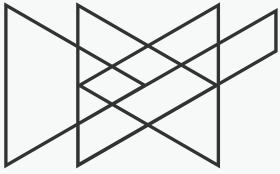
9.

Allowing enough time and resources for communities to develop at a sustainable pace.

10.

Ongoing support with elements such as basic core costs and wider promotion of activities, that are difficult for independent grassroots collectives to achieve alone. This support could come from an organisation such as YSWN, arts funder, local authority or industry body, for example.





YSWN

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