

# YOUNG WOMEN

# [CODE]

**IMPROVING GENDER  
INCLUSION IN THE  
TECH SECTOR**

# WHAT IS YOUNG WOMEN CODE?

As a unique offer for corporates, funded by the Workplace Equality Fund, The Young Women's Movement (YWM) developed gender inclusive training workshops for tech organisations in Scotland. This training was initially developed to embed our Young Women Code recommendations for cultivating an inclusive workplace culture at CodeClan. This was done in collaboration with young women to ensure we embedded our intersectional feminist principles and values in the training from the outset. We firstly delivered this workshop to CodeClan during June 2023 and then evaluated the process. After this, we developed relationships with four CodeClan partners and delivered training to each organisation between August and November 2023. From feedback given by each organisation from the first phase of training, we developed additional support training sessions and supportive documents from December 2023 to March 2024.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Note: quotes used in this evaluation come from across each of the partner organisations' training sessions and evaluation feedback given after the YWM sessions.

# YOUNG WOMEN CODE: KEY LEARNINGS

## What they wanted to learn:

- How to build an inclusive working culture without sterilising the working environment;
- How to recognise when humour crosses 'the line' and how to respond to and deal with this in a safe and non-confrontational manner;
- The business case for cultivating a more inclusive workplace;
- What is meant by 'intersectionality' and how to implement inclusive cultures in the workplace;
- How to maintain authenticity in the workplace.

## What YWM learnt:

- The will to learn and grow is there: many organisations want to improve their gender inclusion practices, but need support knowing where to start;
- Participants revelled in the opportunity to ask an expert;
- Workplace culture is essential: staff felt that policies and workplace culture have to go hand-in-hand in order to make a truly inclusive workplace;
- Participants valued the opportunity to share experiences/foreground any concerns and to hear from each other;
- Overall response and buy-in seems to be better when delivering to all staff, including senior leaders e.g. CEO.

# YOUNG WOMEN CODE: KEY LEARNINGS

## How did partner organisations benefit from working with YWM?

*"I found it very interesting hearing more about expectations etc of the younger generation as they are our future employees and this company needs to be a safe space for all people of all ages, gender etc." [training participant]*

- HR and People teams, as well as CEOs, had the distinct opportunity to think about gender inclusion in their workplaces, through their policies and cultures;
- Some organisations have benefitted from having their whole team receive the same training so that the learning is streamlined throughout the organisation;
- Organisations were able to follow up on the feedback given by participants after initial sessions, so that it didn't feel like a stand-alone tick-box exercise;
- Participants were able to feed in what they wanted to get out of future work with the YWM and then benefit from our expertise;
- Organisations were given the option to receive a 'workplace culture' guidance document to use as a starting point to boost organisational accountability;
- Some participants used their learning to make active steps towards being an ally by adding their pronouns to their public profiles/email signatures/BreatheHR;

# YOUNG WOMEN CODE: KEY LEARNINGS

- Participants now understand more ways to be an 'active bystander' in the workplace and outside of the workplace that hadn't been as directly obvious to them before;
- Organisations have started conversations about how they can improve their inclusive policies and the importance of bettering workplace culture, for an inclusive working environment;
- Participants have opened wider discussions about young people's expectations when entering the workplace;
- Organisations have benefitted from gaining the YWM as a contact they can reach out to for future collaboration.

## Contents

<b>Introduction to Young Women Code</b>	<b>6</b>
Who we worked with?	
Initial Training	
Additional Support	
<b>Reflections from Initial CodeClan workshops</b>	<b>8</b>
Key learning from CodeClan	
CodeClan participants were most interested in	
What did CodeClan participants like?	
Impact of the training on CodeClan	
Claire, CodeClan, 2023	
<b>Setting up the initial partner training</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Key reflections &amp; learning: partner training</b>	<b>18</b>
Areas of Impact	
Impact	
Participant questions	
What did they learn?	
What they'd like to learn in the future?	
Improvements for future training	
Challenges	
<b>Notes on partnership building</b>	<b>28</b>
Feedback from partners	
Learning for next steps	
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>31</b>
What additional support did partners want?	
<b>Final Conclusions</b>	<b>39</b>
How did partners benefit from working with the YWM?	
Notes on facilitating the project	
Benefits of continuing Young Women Code work in the future	
<b>Thank you!</b>	<b>44</b>

# INTRODUCTION TO YOUNG WOMEN CODE

## Who we worked with:

Young Women Code training sessions were developed with organisations who had previously partnered with CodeClan – all partner relationships were built prior to the liquidation of CodeClan in Summer 2023. YWM sent out a call-out for organisations interested in bespoke gender inclusion training, through CodeClan. Organisations filled out a short form to register their interest, after which YWM met with their key contact via a Teams call to discuss the offer. After the organisations chose to join the project and signed a Memorandum of Understanding, YWM met with their Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) to discuss their interest in the project, aims, and practicalities of delivering the training. SLTs also had the opportunity to input on scenarios to be discussed during the training and to review the training plan and PowerPoint in advance of the session.

## Initial Training

CodeClan - delivered twice in-person, once online, 2 hours each (35 participants total)

Partner A – delivered five times (two of which were shorter sessions for individual staff members due to availability constraints/pending Maternity Leave) to the full team, once in-person and the rest online, including the CEO, 2.5 hours each (16 participants total)

Partner B – delivered three times to the full team, all online, 2 hours 45 mins each (31 participants total)

Partner C – delivered twice, once in-person and once online, 2 hours each (30 participants, all managers)

Partner D – delivered in 3 x 1-hour sessions (20 participants)

# INTRODUCTION TO YOUNG WOMEN CODE

## Additional Support

Partner A – workshop on getting the workplace ready for the new generation and being an active bystander, delivered twice (once in-person, once online) to the full team, including the CEO, 2 hours each (17 participants total)

Partner B – workshop on being an active bystander, delivered once online, 1-hour webinar (16 participants in total)

Partner C – women in tech sharing circle, delivered once, 1-hour online (4 participants)

Partner D – discussion about 'transitioning in the workplace' guidance document (1 Teams call)

# REFLECTIONS FROM INITIAL CODECLAN WORKSHOPS

## Key Learning from CodeClan

- After testing timings in the first session, we learnt where people wanted to spend most of the time: in focused group discussion;
- CEO/SLT being present creates a different dynamic, particularly relating to open discussion and questions;
- During the online session, fewer ideas were bounced between people and feedback from breakout rooms was much more concise. In future, it's essential to encourage participation in other ways, e.g. polls and reactions;
- Things can be more easily misconstrued when people are online as you can't always see faces and interpret body language.

## CodeClan participants were interested in:

- Learning from each other through group discussion;
- Intersectionality and what this means more practically;
- Discussing language and how to get it 'right', particularly regarding pronouns and the terms 'mansplaining' and 'male privilege'.

*"I think talking about how society is set up in such a way that women are disadvantaged at every turn [...] all the many ways this manifests was a really good way to draw attention to what male privilege really means."*  
[evaluation feedback]

# REFLECTIONS FROM INITIAL CODECLAN WORKSHOPS

## What did CodeClan participants like?

- There was a lot of positive feedback throughout. Participants enjoyed:
- The balance of activities and content;
- Mixing up of departments amongst the staff participating;
- The opportunity to ask questions;
- Building the safe space agreements and discussing how this could be reflected in a workplace.

*"I really liked the use of 'classroom agreement' - it's something I am going to start using with students instead of 'classroom rules'. I think language was the main thing I took away." [evaluation form feedback]*

*"Overall I thought it was really good and hopefully this sort of training begins to get delivered more widely across all sectors" [evaluation feedback]*

# REFLECTIONS FROM INITIAL CODECLAN WORKSHOPS

## Impact of the training on CodeClan

- Participant confidence supporting young women in their role increased from average 3.88/5 to 4.22/5 after the workshop;
- Multiple participants said that the training made them think more actively about their use of language and their understanding of other people's contexts;
- Participants felt that they had developed their understanding about the wider context of gender equality and how that impacts the workplace;
- Participants gained understanding of the value of supporting each other's learning and development, and ways to use learning from the session in their daily working lives.

Giving people an open platform to ask questions and have discussions they otherwise wouldn't get the opportunity to, meant that staff were very active in having honest and vulnerable discussions with each other about the content and context. This seemed to catalyse their desire to have further discussions outside of the workshop.

This demonstrates that people already have questions they want to ask but don't have the safe platform or trusted experts to ask, and the importance of providing this in a non-judgmental space.

*"I'm less scared of saying or doing the 'wrong' thing. It feels like we're all learning and trying to get better at understanding EDI." [evaluation feedback]*

# REFLECTIONS FROM INITIAL CODECLAN WORKSHOPS

*"It would be good if the session was extended, or if there was a second session which delves deeper into the topics." [evaluation feedback]*

The training with CodeClan led to deliberate actions to be taken with the partner training, including:

- Building a strong relationship with team leaders to ensure team-wide buy-in;
- Varying groups when people are in breakouts to discuss scenarios;
- Ensuring the onboarding form is available as both a link and QR code at every opportunity;
- Allotting more open discussion time.

## Claire, CodeClan, 2023

One young woman who worked at CodeClan gained huge personal benefit from being part of the Young Women Code project.

*"Young Women Code has actually had a really positive impact on my career [...] participating in the project showed me just how much of an impact I can make as a woman in the tech industry."*

When we began the Young Women Code project, Claire worked in comms and marketing at CodeClan. By the end of the project, she had begun retraining to pursue a career in software development and UX design, telling us that the project "did play a role" in this decision.

# REFLECTIONS FROM INITIAL CODECLAN WORKSHOPS

*"[since the training] I'm a lot more confident in what I do because I know that I do have those skills and I'm able to use that little bit of information [about how differently people approach job descriptions] to kind of propel myself forward."*

She told us that the project was "refreshing" and opened her eyes to other people's barriers, as well as her own:

*"hearing from people who are single parents about the barriers that they face [...] was a very eye-opening experience."*

For Claire, the most valuable part of undergoing a project like this in the workplace was how it enabled open and honest conversations that staff otherwise would not have had the opportunity to have. They were able to cathartically talk about often negative experiences in a safe space, and have others recognise these as valid.

*"I remember on the days that we had the trainings, those conversations carrying on when we were at lunch or across the next few days [...] people saying 'you know I hadn't realised x, y, z, but I'm going to take that forward, I'm going to change the language I use, make sure it's not too gendered' [...] ultimately I feel like the project had a really wonderful impact on the community at CodeClan."*

# SETTING UP THE INITIAL PARTNER TRAINING

With partner organisations, we had to work around various factors, such as:

- Availability constraints;
- Board approval;
- A sense of the maximum amount of time that the workshops could be in order to ensure attendance.

The two smaller organisations (Partner A and Partner B) chose to train everybody at the organisation to get all staff to the same level. Partner D, a bigger organisation, offered the training out to one self-selecting cohort, resulting in mostly women being trained. Partner C, another large organisation, chose to train two cohorts, all at managerial level, meaning that it was mostly men trained. Note, however, that not all participants filled out the onboarding and/or evaluation forms collecting their gender data.

## Aims developed by Partner SLTs

At the beginning of the sessions, we worked with SLTs to develop the aims they wanted their colleagues to be working towards.

All partner orgs focused on:

- Collective responsibility for inclusion in the workplace;
- Understanding intersectionality.

# SETTING UP THE INITIAL PARTNER TRAINING

Some were interested in:

- The business case for workplace inclusion;
- Language use;
- How to share learning across the sector;
- Shifting their own perspectives.

## Aims developed by participants during the session:

At the beginning of the sessions, we asked participants about what they wanted to get out of the training.

Common aims surrounded:

- Language:
- Understanding of and confidence in the 'right'/up-to-date language to use;
- Humour – what is/isn't acceptable? Where is 'the line'? What are the negative effects of gendered language?
- Confidence and knowledge:
- Feeling confident to educate others;
- Challenging our own knowledge/preconceptions;
- Active promotion of diversity and inclusion:
- What does intersectionality look like in the workplace?
- What does inclusion mean practically? E.g. job descriptions/policies.

# SETTING UP THE INITIAL PARTNER TRAINING

Some participants wanted to focus on:

- Understanding how to build a safe and brave space at work;
- Business case:
  - What to use for competitive advantage to get more women into all areas;
  - What investors are interested in;
- Supporting others:
  - Hearing and understanding the experiences of colleagues;
  - How to identify those who need support in this area;
  - How to support those who haven't expressed their experiences of marginalisation;
- Understanding generational and gendered gaps:
  - What young people know/expect surrounding inclusion;
  - Ensuring young women are integrated into the org as much as young men are;
- Normalisation:
  - Making sure the whole organisation is buying into this/embracing it into their work.

# SETTING UP THE INITIAL PARTNER TRAINING

## Participant Reservations

At the beginning of the sessions, we asked participants about any concerns or reservations that they had about the training.

Common reservations surrounded:

- Language:
- Day-to-day - unintentionally offending people;
- Saying the 'wrong' thing;
- The unknown;
- Participants were concerned about potentially discussing topics that were new to them, where they weren't sure about the 'right' and 'wrong' thing to say;
- Working culture:
- Not driving culture of fear/sterile working environment but driving genuine positivity and care – focus on education;
- People not being able to be authentic/themselves;
- How to still have humour without offending people.

Some participants were concerned about:

- "Getting a bit of a reality check" – realising they've "been doing everything wrong";
- Could focusing on gender mean that we aren't focusing on other things?
- Who can be the authority on what is okay/not okay to say?
- As a woman in a man's world – am I perpetuating the problem?
- How the company comes across during the project;
- What is actually important/genuine vs what media says are the most important issues;
- After seeing the activities beforehand, a trans participant wanted to ensure the environment would be respectful – mentioned how sometimes these types of trainings can be 'talking over' as opposed to 'talking to'.

# SETTING UP THE INITIAL PARTNER TRAINING

## Training 'Safe Space Agreements'

The safe space agreements developed at the start of each session reflected the group's willingness to learn from the sessions and to respect each other's points of view.

Most participants agreed to:

- Show respect to one another;
- No silly/stupid questions; it's okay not to know;
- Discuss their points of view in a non-judgmental space;
- Engage in active listening;
- It's okay to say anything, but you have to listen to responses/answers to what you say.

Some participants agreed to:

- Confidentiality - examples given by participants stay in this room;
- Freedom to ask for clarification/explanations;
- Having good intentions;
- Understand everyone is here to learn;
- Have no hierarchy in the room among staff.

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING: PARTNER TRAINING

## Areas of interest

Most were interested in:

- Language and pronouns;
- Normalising an actively inclusive culture;
- The idea of professionalism and different gendered expectations;
- Active bystander training (for outside as well as at work);
- 'Mansplaining.'

Some were interested in:

- What we can do to mitigate early stereotyping;
- Parents in the workplace;
- Resources for dealing with microaggressions;
- Learning about how they can promote inclusion in the wider sector.

## Impact<sup>2</sup>

- Every organisational evaluation showed an increase in the average of how confident participants feel post-training in supporting young women in their roles; an increase of between 0.29/5 and 0.84/5
  - note: where the whole organisation was trained, there was a greater average increase (0.75/5 and 0.84/5 respectively).
- Between 60% and 100% of participants overall 'agreed; or 'strongly agreed' that the training had met the aims set out initially by the SLTs
- Note: where the whole organisation was trained, 100% of participants 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'.

<sup>2</sup> Partner A  
• 8 respondents  
• Average 4.38/5 on how confident participants feel supporting young women in their role, after the training (1 being not confident at all, 5 being incredibly confident (3.63 average pre-training from 16 respondents)  
• 63% strongly agree that aims met, 38% agree

Partner B  
• 9 respondents  
• Average 4.22/5 on how confident participants feel supporting young women in their role, after the training (1 being not confident at all, 5 being incredibly confident (3.38 average pre-training from 17 respondents)

Partner C  
• 9 respondents  
• Average 4.11/5 on how confident participants feel supporting young women in their role, after the training (1 being not confident at all, 5 being incredibly confident (3.64 average pre-training from 14 respondents)  
• 22% strongly agree that it met aims, 67% agree, 11% neither agree nor disagree

Partner D  
• average 3.60/5 on how confident participants feel supporting young women in their role, after the training (1 being not confident at all, 5 being incredibly confident (3.31 average pre-training from 16 respondents)  
• 60% agreed training met aims, 30% neither agree nor disagree, 10% disagree

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING: PARTNER TRAINING

## Participant Questions: Culture

Most organisations wanted to know about 'banter' and where the 'line' is with humour. They were interested in how to recognise if you're offending someone and how to react to this in a safe and non-confrontational manner, as well as how to combat 'banter' "both as the person it is directed at, but also as someone observing it."

Some participants were keen to ask about balancing gender inclusion with 'other types' of inclusion, as there were fears that supporting one marginalised group would mean "taking from" others.

One conversation on handling microaggressions centred on transphobia in the workplace, and how to recognise and deal with it. This conversation focused on how to handle two scenarios and encouraged thinking about both deliberate and unconscious bias.

This fed into discussions about how to be an active bystander in general, but also how to do this without being patronising:

*"How to know when to step in in a situation – where's the line, what is and isn't patronising, worry about 'coming to the rescue'."*

There were also questions about recognising your own privilege and managing this, particularly if you're mentoring someone who has very different experiences to you and therefore you may not be aware of the biases and discrimination that they face; for example, as a woman in a male-dominated industry. This was linked to questions about tokenism, both how to recognise and deal with this:

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING: PARTNER TRAINING

*"How to make the only woman in a team of males - e.g. a team of 6 or 7 people, feel comfortable and included."*

Some questions thought about the lack of balance in office labour/admin, with women discussing their experiences of doing this kind of work, outside of their job description, disproportionately, whilst many men in the room noted that they were unaware that this was an issue at all.

There were multiple conversations around ideas of 'professionalism', particularly thinking about how "quiet women are often seen as incompetent" and therefore passed up for promotion. Conversations centred around how to support people to put themselves up for promotion, but also the importance of considering all staff members for promotions in different ways, such as pay rises and promotion opportunities that don't always require managing people.

Thinking about boundaries was very important to participants, especially regarding how to approach discussions about implementing safe and clear boundaries and how to deal with difficult scenarios when colleagues have different or opposing views.

*"how do you challenge people to rethink their comments/statements without limiting their speech or dismissing their views?"*

*"Are old fashioned 'gentleman' qualities now inappropriate for the office? Can I hold a door open for a female colleague or comment on their hair/clothing (as I would also for a male) without causing upset or a problem? Becoming wary of crossing 'the line'."*

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING:

## PARTNER TRAINING

### Participant Questions: Language

Regarding language, they were interested in how to ensure language used to address wider groups is not gendered, e.g. alternatives to 'guys' for addressing large groups. In particular, they wanted to discuss gendered language, such as 'lass' and 'girl', how to approach reducing this, as well as discussing people's motivations surrounding this – such as age and regional dialect – and how people might receive 'gendered language' in different contexts.

There were a range of questions surrounding the concept of pronouns and gender identity, thinking about how to approach questions about people's gender identity, as well as what they can do as a workplace to demonstrate overtly that they are trans-inclusive. Not all participants approached this with the same patience and compassion and there was sometimes some uncertainty around the concept of pronouns, including from an English as a foreign language (EASL) point of view. Not all participants were keen to begin using these publicly, e.g. on an email signatures, but there was widespread investment in starting to think about this and what it could mean for young people joining the organisation who are perhaps more armed with knowledge on this topic. People were also interested in the usage of titles (Mr/Mrs/Ms) and how necessary these actually are.

There were always questions about 'mansplaining', both thinking about its definition and sometimes the inherent gendering of the term itself. Participants asked about sensitivity and whether all colleagues feel the same weight to being patronised by male colleagues, with some women noting that this is just something that they're used to and don't think much of. However, there were some participants who were keen to know how to arm their younger colleagues with tools to deal with this confidently. Some colleagues were also very interested in recognising this behaviour in themselves and learning how to stop it.

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING: PARTNER TRAINING

## What did they learn?

Most participants learnt about structural issues surrounding gender inclusion, inclusive language use, pronouns, and gained confidence when discussing gender in the workplace.

*"I will be more confident in challenging people"*

*"I learned that subconscious bias starts very early in people's lives".*

They reported learning what pronouns mean, how to discuss them, and the benefits of signposting them.

*"[I learnt that] The use of pronouns to make others feel more safe and be more inclusive."*

*"As someone with she/her pronouns as I was born a woman, I wasn't sure if it would be disrespectful of me to put my pronouns up but now I realise that I can do this as it will help others feel more comfortable."*

*"I hadn't thought about how stating my pronouns on (social media) profiles & in work might act as an "ally"."*

Participants learnt about the concept of 'intersectionality' and what it means to be an 'active bystander' in theory, which made them interested in having more training on the various ways to do this in practice. They also discussed boundaries at length, thinking about some of the "less obvious implications of language use," for example, thinking about the gendering of the terms 'soft' and 'hard' skills.

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING: PARTNER TRAINING

*"[I have learnt] what is considered non-inclusive language. Now I have more confidence in calling this out"*

*"will be far more conscious to avoid "mansplaining" and make more of an active effort to be an Active Bystander when necessary."*

Participants talked through the importance of active and deliberate inclusion, instead of passively assuming inclusion and why this is so important. Participants talked about the need for consistency with flexibility – both for those who are parents and those who aren't. Many participants were also particularly interested in the gendered differences in how people apply for jobs.

*"I think the training did a good job at highlighting the bias that exists and the barriers women face in the workplace."*

Participants discussed the value of colleagues discussing their experiences and enabling others to learn from these:

*"I wouldn't have had such open discussions on these kinds of topics with them so hearing their opinions was really insightful."*

Participants felt that the training gave them the opportunity to:

*"Develop more empathy towards people who are less aware of what their actions and words may come across as."*

*"Taking the time to learn more and engage with people and be respectful."*

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING:

## PARTNER TRAINING

Partner A in particular discussed the value in the organisation itself having core values that are people-based and that all staff can speak to. Other organisations felt that a resource like this would be valuable to support their teams.

Some talked about the training giving them the chance to broaden their perspectives as a leader, especially in thinking about the different experiences those they manage may have than themselves:

*"I will try to be more supportive for everyone that reports to me - and not make any assumptions."*

*"[I will] Engage more with female engineers - ask if they have encountered challenges in our workplace due to their gender"*

### What they'd like to learn in the future?

Most participants would like

- More training that builds on cultivating inclusive workplace cultures – e.g. for HR, policies, etc.;
- Active bystander training.

Some participants wanted:

- A sharing knowledge toolkit:
- e.g. a bullet point fact sheet on website;
- A way to set communication boundaries – soft policies showing people how to approach discomfort;

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING:

## PARTNER TRAINING

- *"The biggest question I came away with [...] is "how can I make people (men) realise that this is their problem too?". Which is nearly impossible, but I do think some training around this, even if it's just supporting women to develop the confidence in speaking up, would be great."*
- *"some guidance on what a male manager should be aware of/accommodating/actively doing when managing a female (or other gender)."*
- An anonymous suggestion/question box in the office and online that can be used to highlight issues - for example, language use and preferences;
- Wider inclusion training, having expected this to be about diversity and inclusion more generally, as opposed to singular focus on gender;
- Tools for how they can fan out their learning and practice across the sector.

### Improvements for future training

Most participants suggested more time in the session to dedicate to going into the scenarios in more detail. Some advocated for a full-day training to provide more time for in-depth discussion.

Where the training was only delivered to select staff members (managers only), participants suggested that the training be delivered to the wider team as well. They also felt that a "shareable resource" to have at hand for the whole team would be valuable.

Meanwhile, where participation was voluntary, some participants felt that it should be aimed at a less general level as, though it "created a good foundation", they felt that those who sign themselves up tend to already have a better than average level of knowledge on the subject anyway, due to their interest.

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING:

## PARTNER TRAINING

Some participants suggested having more practical and clear-cut solutions as well as more ambiguous examples to discuss;

*"I felt the course was very thorough but maybe more real world examples to put lesser-known phrases or topics into context."*

*"I think there was a strong focus on pronouns. That's not to say it's not important, just that a lot of the gaps lie elsewhere (which is from my personal experience, where pronouns are less relevant). A lot of these are more nuanced and less easy to address, but for example, the challenges of being a working mum, of being a female career changer and the stereotypes that are faced."*

### Challenges

Each organisation came with its own different size, structure, and culture. The two smaller organisations who both had their full staff team trained seemed to benefit most from the training, as everyone was able to access the same base learning. It also set a very strong precedent that, not only did the SLTs choose to invest the time of the full team into learning about gender inclusion, but they chose to prioritise the training themselves, by joining the sessions (including CEOs).

The largest organisation, where only managers were trained, had some difficulties gaining Board approval, who needed to be encouraged that this was the best use of their time, resulting in the decision that it should only be available to managers and not all staff. There was also a feeling among the Board that the organisation did not need to learn about gender inclusion, a feeling that was not supported by the HR team, who were aware of the large gender disparity across tech roles in the organisation, and their gender pay gap.

# KEY REFLECTIONS & LEARNING: PARTNER TRAINING

One question the Board put to YWM was:

*"Our staff are sensible and we always choose the best person for the job, regardless of gender or background – there are just not enough women applying. Do we really need training?"*

During one of the training sessions for this organisation, there were also challenges with the attitudes of some participants, who demonstrated that some people will actively choose to be disruptive when the topic is gender, and that not everybody wants to learn or adapt any of their views or behaviours. The questions posed to us by the Board about the need for the training, alongside the gendered safeguarding issue that arose during the session, demonstrated a clear need for this kind of training.

There were some challenges with one organisation's structure changing during the project period. Due to a merger with their parent company, almost all key contacts left the organisation. However, they were still very keen to continue working with us and rounding off the learning that had begun, so they introduced us to the EDI team at the parent company to continue discussions after the conclusion of the project.

# NOTES ON PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

## Feedback from Partners

Feedback from partners focused on the value of discussing the workshops beforehand, enabling them to co-develop the scenarios to ensure they were suitable for their organisational contexts and cultures. Partners also valued the style of the training giving staff the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from each other.

*"I think the content was aimed at the right level with good discussion points; it opens the door for further conversation and learning. The follow up email with lots of signposting to different resources and information is also really useful."*

Staff valued having the opportunity to have some sessions in-person, as it could support a more open group dynamic. However, partners really appreciated the flexibility in the offer to run some sessions online, to support wider participation and enable more people to engage through tools like the chat and polls.

*"The second session was definitely the best - there was a lot of discussion and it felt very engaging. It also felt more accessible because it was interactive (e.g. polls) without always being put on the spot to speak up."*

Partner A had particularly active and deliberate engagement. Our key contact noted that even staff who usually don't contribute a lot in group settings were participating actively and enthusiastically.

*"Very interesting and thought-provoking"*

# NOTES ON PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

The environment created by the relaxed facilitation style and safe-space building exercise at the start was really beneficial in supporting staff to engage, open up, and actively listen to the experiences of others.

*"[the facilitator] was great and created a relaxed environment where I hope the whole team felt comfortable and able to share their opinions, concerns and experiences."*

*"[the facilitator] was approachable and explained complex and fuzzy topics very well (where there's no clear definition)."*

Some organisations found the training valuable as a validating exercise, as the compassionate and patient approach to the training itself, and the conversations it enabled, demonstrated their positive working culture. This was particularly significant with the two smaller organisations, where the training was delivered to all staff. In both of these organisations, there were also decisions from various staff members to add their pronouns to their email sign-off/Breathe HR profile, after the learning provided by the sessions.

Training in which senior leadership had less buy-in, or supported a sense that the training itself was a tick-box exercise, had less vocal appreciation for the training and the culture the sessions themselves demonstrated.

# NOTES ON PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

## Learning for Next Steps

Multiple training sessions had participants who felt that their knowledge had been strong enough in the first instance and that therefore they expected this to be more of a deep dive into (gender) inclusion. It can be difficult to meet expectations and requirements when all participants arrive at different levels. Therefore, it's essential to manage expectations with clarity that the aim is to ensure that all participants have access to the same level of understanding before we are able to delve more deeply. In future, this could be managed by delivering various workshops aimed at different levels.

Meeting the key contact at the partner organisation at the beginning of the process (and consistently throughout) was valuable for building up a strong relationship, collaborating to ensure the resources were suitable for the organisation's needs and context, and for managing anxieties. Having a call the week before the session to go through the powerpoint and ensure the partner felt adequately prepared for the sessions also supported this.

## What additional support did partners want?

- Active bystander training to put the skills and theory learnt to practical use;
- Having a 'workplace culture agreement' resource to support accountability;
- Training to help the organisation get ready for the new generation;
- Recommendations on what more they can do to support young women's inclusion in the workplace;
- Wider signposting to training looking into different types of diversity and inclusion.

## Partner A

After gaining a collective base-level of knowledge organisation-wide, Partner A received a 'gender inclusion deep dive' workshop to further their learning from the first sessions, including 'getting ready for next generation' in the workplace and 'active bystander' scenarios. These sessions were held in February 2024. Discussions among participants during these sessions also referenced themes from the original training YWM delivered to them, demonstrating how they have digested and utilised their learning since that first session.

*One key question asked ahead of the sessions was: "How can I support others to feel safe and supported to speak up if they see something against our values?"*

We delivered to the whole team, including the CEO: one session in-person to 10 people in Perth, with some participants travelling down from Aberdeen specifically for the session, and one online to 7 people.

Discussions about the new generation in the workplace centred on 'assumptions', which some participants mentioned felt very aligned with the idea of 'imposter syndrome.' One participant also noted that these assumptions felt like they had been similar for them entering the workplace at a younger age, but that now there seems to be more of an active conversation around these that allows young people to have more choice, meaning that organisations have to be prepared for these conversations.

Participants also talked about young people's idea of having to go above and beyond to get 'brownie points' in the workplace. They noted that, though it can be valuable to create a culture where people want to learn and grow, there must be structures in place to give transparency about where your additional input is going and what it is moving towards. Managers mentioned that Partner A have structured learning pathways and banded pay that address this need for transparency. There was some surprise that there were no assumptions surrounding career progression, and that some people assume that they can't be promoted because they are young. One participant also talked about the fact that external colleagues often assume that being young means they have limited expertise, due to general assumptions of what a manager/expert looks like.

The active bystander portion of the session was successful in building their confidence in being an 'active bystander' in the workplace. Before the session, participants' confidence averaged 2.86/5. After the session, it increased to 4.00/5.



Participants were interested in the differences between being a 'passive' and 'active' bystander, particularly considering the "right thing to do" in the workplace environment. When asked in the evaluation what made them think

differently during the session, participants noted:

*"There are multiple ways that you can be an Active Bystander rather than just being completely direct with the person who might be acting inappropriately."*

*"Trying to be more empathetic and understand how a young woman (18-30) could feel in the workplace."*

*"I hadn't considered there were other ways to be an active bystander - I thought action always needed to be direct which has sometimes discouraged me from 'getting involved' due to fear of repercussions, so learning how I could support someone in other ways whilst keeping myself safe was really useful."*

Overall, participants found the session useful to prompt discussions within the team and learn about the spectrum of ways you can be an active bystander within the workplace, ensuring everyone is able to find a method which works for them. The team were particularly interested in the option to 'document' an incident as a valuable way to keep track in a workplace and feed into any further disciplinary action that may be required.

Partner A also received a 'key recommendations' document – a one-pager with suggestions on what they can do next, such as running 'women in the tech sector' sharing workshops.

## Partner B

Partner B received one lunchtime webinar on 'being an active bystander in the workplace' with 16 participants, held in February 2024.

Participants were interested in how to deal with possible backlash following a confrontation, potential awkwardness with getting it wrong, not wanting to be "that guy" who calls people out constantly.

They discussed there not being a "one size fits all" answer to how to handle situations, especially when thinking about power dynamics. Before the session, participants' confidence averaged 2.90/5. After the session, it increased to 3.50/5.



When asked in the evaluation what made them think differently during the session, they mentioned:

*"There are various options and approaches that can be used to intervene when needed. I would like to find out more about them."*

*"I didn't realise it would be possible to help indirectly in situations by distracting or documenting. As a person who is generally not very confrontational, this has helped me understand that I can still help in these situations."*

One participant noted that seeing everybody join in on a session like this was a great reflection of their commitment to their overarching organisational culture.

Partner B also received a 'workplace culture agreement' reflecting the safe space agreements we developed in the initial training sessions. They wanted some 'cultural guidelines' for external people at the organisation, as well as internally, to give them something concrete to refer back to and keep people accountable.

## Partner C

Partner C were specifically interested in engaging with women about their experiences at the organisation, as the training had engaged solely with managers and therefore largely male members of staff.

We ran a one-hour workshop with six women who work at Partner C in January 2024, offered to a maximum of 20 women; 4 participants attended. It was a reflective space, looking at:

- Barriers to career development;
- Best practice examples in the workplace;
- What could be improved at Partner C and how?
- What advice do you wish you were given at the start of your career?

The general sense from the session was that different teams have different experiences. One question submitted in advance asked "How is [Partner C] going to tackle sexism within the workplace?" Participants discussed the value in having a manager who allows every team member to have equal opportunity to input opinions; one participant noted feeling "lucky" to have a good manager who will support you, that you feel "helpless" if you don't have that.

Participants rated the usefulness of the session as 4.5/5.



Barriers discussed included:

- Being the first woman somebody has managed and them treating you differently as they don't know how to manage people who aren't men;
- Admin tasks always falling to the one woman in the team;
- As a working mother, experiencing difficulties with childcare needs and costs and maternity leave creating a gap in career development – however they mentioned that their company has worked on improving maternity pay;

- Older women managers in other companies not supporting women with complaints, saying they're "too sensitive" and "that's just how this sector is";
- Using learnings from leadership training they've received and being called "too bossy" or "too assertive" for this – being told "you can't win";
- Being the only woman in the team and being told "your face is saying too much, turn off your camera.";
- Being told "you're making it a gender issue" when mentioning that they can't mirror behaviours of male colleagues;
- Lack of visibility of women in tech roles in the organisation.

Suggestions for improvements at the organisation included:

- Policies could be in place to support working mothers if children fall ill e.g. dependents'/carers' leave;
- It would be good to mix teams so that practice can be shared;
- Doing "more things like this" - roundtables and events for women to network and talk through things more regularly;
- Additional career development opportunities e.g. networking;
- Sharing events in the women in tech community and getting the opportunity to get involved with these (Partner C being more proactive about this);
- Recruitment – one participant mentioned they'd be happy to sit in on interviews so that people aren't being interviewed by panels of all men;
- Managers treating everybody with the same attitude;
- Giving managers training on managing people and teams;
- Honesty with managers – being able to speak to them about your goals one-to-one;
- There should be a process to anonymously give feedback to managers and keep them accountable – supervision for managers and then these being deliberately actioned.

Their key takeaways included:

- "It was good to hear about my female colleagues' experiences and concerns within the company;"
- "[it was] interesting hearing from other teams, will definitely try to reach out more and share ideas and practices;"
- "Met other developers, found out my team isn't the worst to work with at [Partner C]."

Participants were keen that more sessions be run in the future, more regularly, with more time to delve deeper into the topics. They would also be keen to have sharing circles outside of the organisation, to connect more widely with women in the tech sector. One participant was also interested in organisations introducing quotas for hiring women, to ensure women are not "singled out" due to being in a minority.

"It seemed short for me, perhaps we should have less topics to cover in 1 hour session. It would be also good to hear how other tech organisations support women in tech roles and promote them to take leadership roles as well as help them to develop their career in tech."

The group agreed to meet again in 3 months to check in about progress of their feedback.

Partner C also received a 'workplace culture agreement' reflecting the safe space agreements we developed in the initial training sessions. They wanted to have a soft code of conduct to keep them accountable.

## Partner D

Partner D wanted to discuss embedding inclusion around 'transitioning in the workplace' guidance document, with the view to create a firmer company-wide policy, for which we directed them towards LGBTQ+ and trans-focused organisations.

After their merger with their parent company at the end of 2023, Partner D then did not have the time for further support from our organisation within the bounds of this funding but are interested in working together ad-hoc after March 2024. The merger means they don't currently have a D&I working group. Once they've put this together, they're interested in seeing what the organisational needs are after merging with their parent company.

Though Partner D were unable to have as thorough next steps as the other partner organisations, they were initially interested in:

- A deep dive on gender equality and inclusion workshop – info on becoming an ambassador for inclusion in the workplace;
- Role play workshop on competence and handling situations – how to apply your learning.

Each organisation we worked with on Young Women Code benefitted from this project in different ways. These benefits were largely proportional to the engagement and buy-in of senior leaders at each organisation. Having the full organisation join the training sessions led to greater engagement, through breakout discussions and evaluation feedback, leading to 'next steps' work that participants themselves had highlighted being interested in.

Exclusively training managers at one organisation was valuable for beginning to embed the concept of inclusive policies, practices, and culture. However, not having thorough Board and CEO support made this feel more like a tick-box exercise. Nevertheless, working with the 'women's sharing circle' group was incredibly helpful to give the HR team a sense of the need for more gender inclusive support at the organisation.

Most of the partner organisations had some anxieties about spotlighting gender inclusion and not 'other types' of inclusion, with some women having concerns about being spotlighted for their gender, so it was essential to highlight the need for some discomfort in order to learn and develop. This was always done within 'safe and brave' spaces, the parameters of which were set out alongside each individual group at the start of each session. Participants were interested in the idea of safe and brave spaces and how and when these can be reflected within the workplace.

Organisations were generally very keen to know about the research that backed up the points made during the sessions. They also found it very helpful to hear about the facilitator's own feminist journey and the journeys of other participations, to open up discussions about the way learning journeys often include making mistakes and developing your point of view.

There were concerns about authenticity within the working environment, and the project largely demonstrated to participants that building an actively inclusive working culture does not mean 'sanitising' the working environment.

*"[I will] be more mindful of other peoples boundaries with language and humour." [training participant]*

There were also anxieties around language, particularly the term 'banter' and not wanting to immediately have participants feeling targeted and/or defensive via language use, as this could inhibit engagement. This also prompted staff having concerns about getting a balance within the discussions/scenarios and highlighting intersectional concerns, in order not to make men feel targeted and therefore less open to learning. However, one organisation was concerned about YWM pushing a 'political agenda' with the use of the term 'intersectionality.' This demonstrated how essential it was for the facilitator to have open discussions with SLTs before the sessions were delivered, in order to support their understanding in the first instance, and thus their buy-in to the sessions, as this is reflected onto the buy-in of the rest of the staff.

In terms of safeguarding for the facilitator themselves, it is essential that they build that relationship with a key contact in the organisation's HR/People team who can then be present in sessions, bringing that relationship and buy-in along with them. After delivering these sessions, it is clear that it is also valuable to have a co-facilitator present, both to support facilitation (especially online) but also to ensure the facilitator feels safe and has a YWM witness, in case any issues arise. It's also essential that the facilitator goes into the training with somebody from the YWM SLT available for them to contact at any point during the session, in case they need support.

## Notes on facilitating the project

As a young woman herself, facilitating this project has come with its own challenges. It demonstrated to her that, though many tech organisations are incredibly keen to improve their practices to welcome young women into the workforce and support with their progression, there are still stigmas around young women's authority in the workplace. She was also exposed to the assumption that she, herself, would not be knowledgeable or capable, due to her age and gender. However, she was also exposed to many people of various ages and genders who took it upon themselves to really get into this work and try to live inclusive values throughout the project. Particularly when there was CEO buy-in to the programme, the appetite to learn and improve was very clearly present; people just didn't know where to start. This project gave them that starting point and expert guidance.

## Benefits of continuing Young Women Code work in the future

There is a real will to engage with gender inclusion training, particularly in the tech sector. Many organisations do not feel confident knowing where to start with this sort of work and need support to begin to understand the level of knowledge/the culture their organisation is beginning at and where they can go from there.

Young Women Code gave one bigger organisation, whose senior leadership/Board did not think there was a need for gender inclusion support within their organisation, a clear demonstration of the need for it, as well as some of their staff's interest in and willingness to engage with it.

Getting a bespoke training package like this for free has been greatly appreciated by smaller organisations who do not have a big budget for a project like this. We have seen the value they have found in this, as the two smaller organisations made the most of the project by having their whole organisation trained. One partner, who demonstrated the highest level of overarching staff buy-in, has chosen to continue to work with us once the Workplace Equality Fund funding ends, as they believe the work we are doing is worth the financial commitment. Being able to pilot the programme successfully, without financial implication and therefore with lowered risk, demonstrated to the organisation both the worth of gender inclusion work more generally, and the value of having the YWM deliver such work. They have been very vocal about their appreciation for our approach and the clear cultural values we bring with us to the project.

## How did partners benefit from working with the YWM?

*"I found it very interesting hearing more about expectations etc of the younger generation as they are our future employees and this company needs to be a safe space for all people of all ages, gender etc" [training participant]*

- HR and People teams, as well as CEOs, had the distinct opportunity to think about gender inclusion in their workplaces, through their policies and cultures;
- Some organisations have benefitted from having their whole team receive the same training so that the learning is streamlined throughout the organisation;
- Organisations were able to follow up on the feedback given by participants after initial sessions, so that it didn't feel like a stand-alone tick-box exercise;
- Participants were able to feed in what they wanted to get out of future work with the YWM and then benefit from our expertise;
- Organisations were given the option to receive a 'workplace culture' guidance document to use as a starting point to boost organisational accountability;
- Some participants used their learning to make active steps towards being an ally by adding their pronouns to their public profiles/email signatures/BreatheHR;
- Participants now understand more ways to be an 'active bystander' in the workplace and outside of the workplace that hadn't been as directly obvious to them before;
- Organisations have started conversations about how they can improve their inclusive policies and the importance of bettering workplace culture, for an inclusive working environment;
- Participants have opened wider discussions about young people's expectations when entering the workplace;
- Organisations have benefitted from gaining the YWM as a contact they can reach out to for future collaboration.

# THANK YOU

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