

OPENING ARCHIVES CASE STUDY

SHEFFIELD FEMINIST ARCHIVE (SFA)

Women in Lockdown



HERITAGE DOMAIN:

Community Archives.

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Women in Lockdown aimed to document women's experiences of the pandemic - in their own words - through written, audio, and creative accounts. Through a series of pop-up events, online events, and postcard boxes in community spaces, the project engaged new participants and asked them to contribute their stories. SFA worked with a socially engaged web design agency to co-design and build an interactive, open-access digital archive of the submissions that were collected.

PROJECT STATS (data accurate as of April 2022):

- 3 core activities reaching 33 participants and a further 2 events online reaching 23 participants.
- 533 individual visits to the DDA online project page, with 61 downloads of project-specific resources.
- 15 unique organisations engaged with over the duration of the project.

SUCCESES:

- Being selected as one of TAA's Opening Archives projects has enabled SFA to grow Women in Lockdown from something which existed solely online and reached a small audience, into a far-reaching community project with a diversity of participants.
- SFA have been able to make lasting investments and put their name out there as an open, intersectional feminist group, seeking to play an active part in Sheffield's cultural and social life.
- Remaining adaptable. Omicron hit right in the middle of this project and put a halt on a lot of the in-person work that had been planned. Working with partners helped them to respond dynamically and keep the project live.

LEARNINGS:

- Co-designing a website or any other content, digital or analogue, is about consensus and input from all stakeholders, and if the process is to be respected, it shouldn't be rushed or pushed ahead.
- In order for a contemporary collecting project like this to be successful, it must be as accessible as possible. Potential participants should be met where they're at, and the process of contributing and taking part must be straightforward and, often, come with no strings attached (e.g., anonymising submissions to facilitate honest reflections on the pandemic).

TOP TIP FOR WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES AND ARCHIVES:

Building up trusting, mutually beneficial and (we hope) lasting relationships with other community groups takes time, and these relationships are more often built over a cup of tea than an email or a tweet.

LINK TO DIGITAL OUTPUTS:

<https://sheffieldfeministarchive.co.uk/>

