



**Hands in the Earth:**

**Photography and Creative Writing  
Project 2011-12**

**EVALUATION**



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 YUMI

YUMI (York Unifying Multicultural Initiative) is a local, voluntary, grassroots organisation established in 2004. Working with people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, YUMI emerged in response to York's rapidly changing demographics (the proportion of the population in York classified as not 'White British' has risen from 4.9% in 2001 to 11% in 2010, *Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010*).

YUMI aims to:

- significantly strengthen the sense of confidence and belonging in people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups in York, and;
- positively influence attitudes to difference and diversity.

YUMI's objectives are to empower people from BME groups who are often vulnerable and isolated to make significant and lasting change to their lives by supporting them to:

- engage in and lead community activities; and
- take on leadership and mentoring roles in the community.

An intrinsic part of YUMI's work involves developing the skills, knowledge and experience between the organization's volunteer network to enable the realization of YUMI's aims and objectives.

In 2010-2011 YUMI developed a new strategic plan that included the following aims, to which this project was aligned:

- Providing a wider range of unusual and inspiring opportunities to become involved in arts-based activities
- Developing participants' skills and confidence through activities, training and mentoring
- Encouraging more people from BME groups to get involved
- Raising our profile to York residents and local organizations

## 1.2 The Project

The idea behind the project originated from photographer Karen Lennox, who was inspired by a visit to YUMI's international

community garden and the community of volunteers who worked there. Karen thought the garden project and the people involved would make a fascinating subject for a book and approached YUMI with the idea of running a project that would culminate in the creation of a book about the garden.

With this project, YUMI set out to offer immigrants to York and people born in the city a chance to work with a photographer, a writer and a graphic designer to:

- learn creative photography techniques
- develop story-telling and creative writing skills
- design and create an art book using their own images and texts
- exhibit a selection of their work

The subject-matter and inspiration for this work is YUMI's International Community Garden; the people who work there, the produce they grow and the memories and stories evoked by growing, cooking and eating together.

The overall aims for the project were to:

- bring together and inspire people from diverse backgrounds to express their unique perspective through images and words
- increase confidence and skill in practicing an art form that is new to them
- collaborate and co-operate as participants, photographers, writers and designers
- encourage future participation in arts projects
- increase the social confidence of participants and public awareness of cultural diversity in York

Two groups were established, one learning about photography, led by photographer Karen Lennox, and the other creative writing, led by writer and broadcaster Jenny Zobel.

The photography workshops set out to provide practical explorations

of the medium suitable for all levels of experience. Taking the community garden as their inspiration, participants were given the opportunity to:

- explore some of the creative and enjoyable ways of making images without a camera, including cyanotypes, scanner photography and photograms
- make and use a simple pinhole camera
- develop their skills and creativity in the use of conventional cameras
- discuss and develop imagery reflecting their own creative responses to the community garden and the people involved in its creation
- develop a critical eye for the medium
- learn from each other about cultural legacies, traditions and taboos in picture-making
- collaborate to make selections of work for exhibition and book

The writing workshops set out to explore the personal and cultural associations, memories and stories evoked through the plants, activities, produce and food cooked in the garden. Participants visited the garden and from their involvement and observations there, they were given the opportunity to:

- work in pairs and small groups to share their experiences and feelings, memories and associations
- learn to speak with clarity and confidence in public by being encouraged to share their stories with a group of people
- enhance their listening skills by developing their ability to listen with empathy as they help others in the group to tell their story
- working from voice to text, learn how to record, transcribe and edit
- create texts for their book
- develop their creative writing skills
- select text for inclusion in their exhibition and book

The final workshop element of the project involved two

representatives from each group working alongside professional book designer Ned Hoste where they have been supported and guided in:

- making decisions about style and layout
- learning how to structure a coherent narrative from disparate elements
- developing the skills of negotiating, listening, expressing ideas and discussing options and possibilities using self-publishing software to create draft spreads for the finished product.

The intended outputs from the project included the staging of an exhibition of words and texts created by project participants in three city centre venues in York and the creation of a book illustrating the participants' creative responses to the YUMI International Community Garden.

## **2 Summary of Findings**

### **2.1 Photography Workshops**

A total of ten participants, representing five different cultural backgrounds, took part in photography workshops, with seven people remaining actively involved until the end of the project. Of the remaining three, one left the country to go travelling, one had to leave the project because of work and personal commitments and the third attended several workshops and then decided that the style of delivery, with lots of discussion around theory, practice and ideas, wasn't suited to her (but commented that she had learned a lot about how to use her camera, particularly experimenting with different apertures).

Six half-day sessions were initially scheduled to take place and included in the project budget. In the end, twelve group sessions were delivered plus one-to-one sessions with eight of the individual participants and a good deal of communication between sessions, via

email and phone.



### **2.1.1 Photography Workshop Aims**

***Aim one: to explore creative ways of making images without a camera, including cyanotypes, scanner photography and photograms***

100% of participants felt that the workshops achieved this aim.

Participants were given the opportunity to try out a wide range of image-making techniques and talked about how much they enjoyed experimenting with them.

*'I think this was one of the most important aspects of the course, as it opened up and redefined my concept of photography and helped me think more creatively. It was really fun using all the different ways to capture images, my favourite was the pinhole, which we developed ourselves...'*

***Aim two: to make and use a simple pinhole camera.***

100% of participants felt that the workshops achieved this aim.

All participants made a pinhole camera and experimented with it by taking shots of the garden and using it at home (with one participant

taking it with her on a visit to family in Canada).

***Aim three: to support participants in developing their skills and creativity in using their camera.***

Again, 100% of participants felt that the workshops achieved this aim.

A good deal of time was spent at the start of the project helping participants become more familiar with their own cameras and the wide range of functions available in even the most simple of digital cameras. This was ongoing throughout, with regular reference to the operating manuals and guidance on how to experiment with the different settings.

Karen discovered that it was difficult to find time within the workshop sessions to give individual attention of sufficient depth to each person. She decided to hold extra one-to-one sessions to address this concern and eight participants were able to take this up, enabling them to define their specific areas of creative interest in terms of subject matter and discuss different approaches to capturing the images they want to create.



*'Looking became more instinctive and happy accidents happened that you could then explore further (and by that time I knew enough about my camera to be able to try and recreate it)!'*

***Aim four: to support participants in discussing and creating images that showed their thoughts and reflections on the YUMI garden and the people who help out there.***

85% of participants felt that the workshops completely achieved this aim, with the remaining 15% feeling that it partially achieved it.

After the initial workshops, which were spent getting to know their cameras, the participants all decided which element(s) of the YUMI garden they would like to capture in their work. They all spent a lot of time in the garden, observing the people at work and talking to them about what they were doing and what attracted them to the garden in the first place. Several participants commented on the fact that they felt they 'got better at looking', noticing the often hidden details and finding themselves drawn to one particular aspect of the garden that they wanted to explore creatively.

There was a recognizable distinctiveness to each person's approach to depicting the community garden. Participants were encouraged to bring their own perspectives to their photography with the result that personality, background, outlook and experiences shaped the styles and subject matter of their images. One very clear example would be Nallely Martinez who talked about the colour and vibrancy of her home country, Mexico. She set out to capture the most vivid colours of the garden and its produce.

Comments on this aspect of the project included:

*'Right from the start we were encouraged to use our own evolving concepts of the garden and its people to develop our photography. We always discussed our concepts behind the images, which was really helpful. I'd say this (as well as technical learning) pretty much lead the whole project, and I found my perspective becoming more intimate and in tune with it all. This could only have happened for me through spending lots of time with everyone and also in the garden alone. Over the months we could get a sense of movement and life in the garden itself, and could appreciate it in it's own pace.'*

*'When I first went to the garden I had no idea what I was going to photograph because I hadn't really seen the garden before. But my horizons were widened when the colours in the garden caught my eye and I just went with it, just took pictures of what looked like what looked photogenic and what looked descent (sic) for what we are trying to do.'*

***Aim five: to help participants develop a critical eye for photography***

100% of participants felt that the workshops achieved this aim. Participants were actively encouraged to share their work with the rest of the group, both during workshop sessions and between sessions, uploading their photos to Picasa albums that they shared with the rest of the group. They were supported by Karen to work in pairs and small groups, discussing their own and each other's work and learning how to critique. This support continued between sessions, with Karen providing feedback on the images uploaded to Picasa, shared with the whole group, and one-to-one feedback to individuals via email, phone and one-to-one sessions.

*'This seemed to be the most difficult process for lots of us. The idea of looking at our photo's critically and also from a zoomed out perspective was hard when we'd spent time getting very involved. It really helped going through together and practising doing this, as well as the editing exercises we did, and it became much easier, especially when I left a bit of space and time between taking photos, and editing through.'*

***Aim six: to help participants learn from each other about cultural traditions and taboos in image making.***

100% of participants felt the workshops achieved this aim. As well as discussing image making traditions with each other and exploring the work of professional photographers in this context, participants also spent a lot of time talking to the people who help out at the YUMI garden, as well as the YUMI cooks who prepare food from their home cultures using produce grown in the garden. They took photographs of people at work in the garden, of the cooks preparing food and also took a series of formal and informal portraits.

*'We learnt lots about established photography in the books that were always there to look through. It was really useful to learn a bit about photographers and go through the ideas behind their work, their issues etc.'*

*'I really enjoyed learning about the people involved in YUMI and having people come along to have portraits taken (they'd talk about their home culture and about their food and where the recipe had come from, where the ingredients come from).'*

***Aim seven: for participants to be involved in selection of images for exhibition and book***

70% of participants were actively involved in selecting images for the exhibition. The remaining 30% had stopped attending workshops before the selection took place but were happy for their images to be included. The two participants who took part in the book design workshops selected images for use in the book, working on selections of images put forward by their fellow participants during earlier workshops.

Participants were supported by Karen in selecting 25 of their photographs that formed a coherent portfolio that they felt reflected what they had set out to capture and their creative development. The aim of this exercise wasn't necessarily to make a selection of images that they wanted to put forward for inclusion in the book and exhibition but rather for participants to focus on their own creative development and vision.

In selecting images for the exhibition, participants worked initially on their own to make a selection of five of their own images to put forward for selection. They then worked as a group to go through all of the images that had been selected and make the final selection for the exhibition. One of the participants volunteered to create mock-ups of how the images would look when hanging in the exhibition space, which helped the group refine their selection and agree on how the images should be grouped and positioned in the final exhibition.

Karen spent time with the group discussing the process of preparing for exhibition, including: how to decide which images to include; different ways of grouping the images in order to tell a story; how to decide how to frame the photographs; the printing process, including minor edits to the photographs in terms of contrast, tone etc; and

the hanging of the images in the exhibition space.

One participant joined Karen at the photographic print lab and the framer's workshop and talked about how she hadn't realised that so much work went into getting photographs exhibition-ready and that she learned a huge amount.

Several members of the group commented on the fact that they found it quite hard to select images that would say something specific about YUMI and the Community Garden, as opposed to simply reflecting their own creative exploration of the garden.

### **2.1.2 Participants' experience of the sessions**

All participants said they enjoyed the sessions, with several commenting on how much they gained from the social aspect of working as part of a group – getting to know new people, feeling comfortable and confident in sharing their thoughts and opinions, discussing ideas at length and learning to critique each other's photos.

Two participants stated that they felt like time was wasted sometimes as there was a lot of time and space for group discussion and they would rather have been actively taking photographs for more of the time. However, the rest of the group seemed to value this shared discussion time, as evidenced in the quotes below.

*'We gelled really quickly as a group and it felt like this evolved quite naturally. I found myself speaking to different people each week. We all became quite close and it felt like there was no ego and no barriers and no need to be ultra polite – felt like I could be myself.'*

*'There was the same level of respect for everyone, no matter how old you were or where you came from.'*

Participants were unanimous in their praise of Karen's style of delivery, saying that there was the right mix of theory and practice and commenting on how flexible she was in terms of structuring sessions according to their interests and support needs and in providing a huge amount of additional support between sessions.

This flexibility was built into the project from the outset, enabling the project to be led as much as possible by the participants' needs and interests.

*'I didn't really want to leave sessions once I was there because I got really into it!'*

*'I really liked Karen and the way she ran the sessions and got us to show each other our work and discuss it (no dread about showing everyone else your work at the end).'*

Participants were also unanimous in agreeing that communication throughout the project was excellent, with an email from Karen before each session outlining what the session would cover, what equipment and materials they needed to bring and ideas to think about for discussion during the session.

When asked if there was anything they would have done differently had they been involved in delivering the project, one participant commented on the fact that, while communication and direction from Karen was clear throughout, they felt that the overall steer for the project, from YUMI, changed as the project went along:

*'YUMI itself was too unclear about what they wanted from the photography workshop'*

### **2.1.3 Links with the Creative Writing Group**

The photography group and creative writing group tended to meet on different days, in the main due to participants' availability and their other commitments. One joint session was held, where the groups shared the work they had completed to date and talked about their vision for the exhibition and book. During this session participants discussed whether pieces of text included in the exhibition and book should relate directly to individual images and came to the conclusion that because the overall theme is the YUMI garden, there did not need to be literal use of the photography to illustrate the text.

When it became clear that it would not be possible to schedule more

joint sessions, it was agreed that the photographers would select images that were then shared with the writing group participants, who each selected images that they felt either resonated with pieces they had already written or inspired them to write new pieces.

Several members of the photography group commented on the fact that they thought it would have been useful and interesting to have held more joint sessions with the writers, whilst acknowledging that they know this would have been difficult to arrange due to the conflicting schedules and commitments of the individual participants.

#### **2.1.4 Participant Outcomes**

Participants all commented on how good it felt to see their photographs exhibited in a public space:

*'I was exited (sic) but nervous at the same time because I've never had any of my work but on public display (sic) before; but now I'm really happy with the results.'*

All participants said that at the start of the project they knew that they were interested in being creative and that taking part in this project has reinforced that feeling and resulted in them being much more confident in their own creative skills and vision.

100% of participants stated that they now feel much more confident in their skills as a photographer:

*'Yes, well I think I've come from almost zero to somewhere miles better. The reason for having skills is so you can realise your ideas, and my learnt skills allow me to do that quite well. I feel drunk with confidence!'*

*'I am talking (sic) more photos now, and trying out more techniques. Before I never took photos as art.'*

Similarly, 100% of participants stated that taking part in the project has made them want to further develop their photography skills:

*'Won't stop now I've started, love it!'*

*'I love the way doing this with you has enlivened me and makes me look and also made the camera to some small degree known enough so it's not an obstacle but an extension of me wanting to do something... this has been a very good thing for me to do, probably added another 5 years to my life!'*

As a direct result of taking part in this project, one of the participants is now volunteering as a photographer on the production of the York Mystery Plays this summer, working alongside other amateur photographers as well as a team of professionals:

*'I wouldn't have done it if it wasn't for this project. I don't feel intimidated by the fact that some of the photographers have been doing it for life.'*

A fourth participant will be appearing in the Mystery Plays as part of the community cast, something she says she would never have put herself forward for had it not been for this project.

88% of participants stated at the end of the project that they were now more likely to get involved in other creative projects in the future, with the remaining 12% saying they were as likely to get involved in other projects as they had been at the outset.

*'Projects like this give you a real insight into how these things work and inspire you to get involved'*

As well as the creative skills outcomes and the increase in their own creative abilities, participants also commented on other outcomes, with several highlighting the importance of the social aspect of working with the others in the group. Several members of the group also commented on how much they'd learned about different cultures through working on the project and talking to members of the YUMI community about their cultural traditions, the gardens they grew up with and their traditional food and celebrations.

Other outcomes included having the opportunity to learn more about how an organization like YUMI is managed and developed; learning skills in communication and presentation from Karen; and

one participant has expressed an interest in learning more about how to develop this kind of community activity, from initial planning and fundraising through to project delivery.

### **2.1.5 Facilitator's Experience of the Project**

At the outset of the project, Karen said that she would like to develop her own skills in the following ways:

- designing, planning and facilitating workshops – continuing to find the most effective ways to engage people in the creative, experimental and conceptual aspects of the medium
- shaping her approach to her own practice – continuing to explore reciprocity between photographer and people photographed, particularly in the context of different cultural backgrounds
- develop her skills from poster, leaflet and booklet design to whole book design and publishing.

Karen used YUMI's ethos of projects being participant-led as a constant guide in planning and delivering her sessions and in the communication with participants between sessions.

She discovered quickly that focusing on the participants' interests and needs meant that she had to build a high degree of flexibility into her approach, letting participants steer discussions so that they could explore their own ideas and approaches to image making and designing sessions to support the areas that participants said they were keen to develop.

This flexibility also extended to the communication between sessions – Karen was in regular communication with participants via email and phone and spent a lot of time giving individuals detailed feedback on their work.

When she felt that the participants had started to develop a sense of what elements of the garden they would like to capture in their work she got them to discuss these ideas in pairs and then offered them

individual one-to-one sessions. In these individual sessions Karen encouraged participants to discuss their ideas in more detail and gave them suggestions both of professional photographers whose work she felt might inspire them and of different photography techniques that might help them capture the images they were after.

Karen feels that she has learned a lot around her first personal aim for the project – that of finding the most effective ways to engage people in the medium. She found that one of the most effective ways of getting participants to discuss and develop their own practice was to get them to study the work of photographers who inspired them in great detail, discuss what it was that they found inspiring and interesting about the images and then attempt to recreate that style of image themselves. One member of the group was initially resistant to this idea, feeling that the images she was capturing were clichéd and had been done before but Karen reinforced the fact that it's what you, as an individual photographer, say with your images that makes them unique.

Karen also feels that working on this project has had a significant impact on her own practice. Talking to other photographers about representation and style (in particular structured talking when leading a workshop) meant she had to think about how to communicate ideas and re-examined photographers who inspired her when seeking out photographers who'd inspire the participants in the group. She feels that this process helped her realize what might be missing/disappearing from her practice and what direction she might want to take her work in. She's started experimenting again (and feels that a new style may develop out of this) and is much more interested in challenging herself now. She believes that this may not have happened if she'd been more of a visiting artist who came in and spoke to the group as opposed to the lively exchange of ideas that took place throughout.

In terms of her third personal aim for the project, that of developing her skills in book design, Karen feels that she has learned a lot through taking part in the book design workshops. While she doesn't feel that she's learned as much about how to use In Design as this part of the process was taken on by two of the participants who

worked on In Design between sessions, she has learned about what publishers will be looking for in submissions, and considering layouts and spreads and how you can use them to guide your reader through your book.

Karen has also realised through her involvement in this project the number of skills that she has built up in other areas over the years. These include project planning and management, managing group dynamics, PR (she wrote the press release for the exhibition) and web development (Karen advised on how to present the exhibition images for sale on the YUMI website).

Karen found the project incredibly challenging at times but also very rewarding. Some of her highlights included observing how much the individual participants were progressing with both their technical ability and their confidence in being able to discuss their creative ideas and give and receive critiques. One particular highlight was the session where the group worked together to select the images that would be included in the exhibition. After an initial introduction to the task, Karen felt that she was able to step back and the group completely took control of the selection process, asking Karen for technical input (e.g. advice around frame sizes etc.) when they felt they needed it but articulating very clearly their vision for the exhibition and their views on which photographs should be included. Karen felt this demonstrated just how far the group had come in their understanding of the medium and their faith in their own abilities.

Karen wrote the following statement about her experience of the project:

*Almost eighteen months ago I wandered into the YUMI community garden, got inspired and immediately wanted to make a book about this extraordinary place and the people involved in the garden project. I had no idea what a rich and fulfilling project this would become with YUMI's enthusiastic support and commitment.*

*Once we got started I found working with the photography group to be one of the most enjoyable, challenging and rewarding experiences*

*of my career. It's hard to plan for a participant-led project and it takes up a lot more time between workshops, but it's worth it. If you are asking the question, "What is it that you would like to achieve?", rather than saying, "This is what I'm going to teach you", you immediately begin to see an individual's creative potential.*

*Another highlight of the project for me was getting to know Jenny Zobel, going along to some of her workshops, and learning from her highly effective techniques for increasing peoples' confidence in their own abilities and drawing out their innate creativity. I would very much like to have the opportunity to work with her again in the future.*

*I found it very stimulating and motivating to have the aim of publishing a book, but I soon realised that it would have been better, from the participants' point of the view, to have lengthened the project period and just focused on everyone producing a book or portfolio of their own for the time being. This would have given them more space for personal development and exploring the subject matter which interested them most, before getting to grips with the inevitable pressure to produce images suitable for mainstream publication. We could also have made this an opportunity for the writers and photographers to work together more closely, something we all feel we should have incorporated from the start of the project.*

## **2.2 Creative Writing Workshops**

A total of five participants, representing five different cultural backgrounds, took part in creative writing workshops, and remained involved throughout the project.

Six half-day sessions were initially scheduled to take place and included in the project budget. In the end, due to the availability of the participants, the sessions were delivered as two-hour long evening sessions and Jenny, the facilitator, also arranged one-to-one sessions with all of the individual participants and was in regular communication with them all throughout the project, via email and phone. Several additional sessions were delivered to ensure that the

participants felt comfortable and confident in selecting the pieces of text for inclusion in the exhibition and book.

When I was little.  
My granny have allotment,  
I was helping my grandma  
and planting and harvesting  
Now I have childhood memory

### 2.2.1 Creative Writing Group Aims

***Aim one: to support participants to work in pairs and small groups to share their experiences and feelings, memories and associations, with a focus on gardens.***

100% of participants felt that the workshops achieved this aim.

The participants all came from very different backgrounds and enjoyed sharing their memories of gardens they've enjoyed throughout their lives and hearing the others tell their stories.

*'It dawned on me that, this was the first thing we do naturally when we visit a garden. We listen to the story of that garden. We begin to form pictures in our mind from the flowers, fruits, colours and smells that evokes wonder feelings. [...] It also keepings (sic) us grounded and in touch with ourselves. It clears our minds'*

As the project progressed and participants became more confident in their own voice and their listening skills, they started to take on more of a co-facilitation role, supporting and encouraging each other in telling their stories.

***Aim Two: to support participants in being able to speak with clarity***

***and confidence in public by being encouraged to share their stories with a group of people***

100% of participants felt the workshops achieved this aim.

Each session started with warm up activities that supported participants in developing their active listening skills. The different accents, voices and levels of language of the participants in the writing group meant that active listening was key and participants quickly gained an appreciation of each other's way of telling their stories – some came with a 'ready-made' story and others developed more of a searching role, using the sessions to develop their stories and bring them out into the open. A real sense of empathy between participants developed from an early stage in the project, with genuine warmth amongst the group whenever they met.

One participant, who said that she felt she had developed the confidence to speak in public through taking part in this project, said:

*'I am a confident person but speaking in public is something I do not do comfortably.'*

Another commented that: *'JZ [Jenny] engendered trust and it was a very supportive and friendly group'*

*Nobody here  
but me ...  
and the wrens.  
Everybody has  
gone on  
holiday*

***Aim three: to support participants in developing skills in creative writing.***

75% of participants felt that the workshops had partially achieved this aim, with the remaining 25% stating that workshops had completely achieved this aim.

All of the participants came from very different starting points in terms of their confidence in their own language and writing skills. With support from Jenny, they learned to have fun with their writing and gradually moved from being very self-critical and focusing solely on the grammar and form of their writing towards a focus on the essence of their stories and ideas and a development of their own individual creative styles. Participants also learned how to give and receive constructive criticism, discussing their writing with each other and giving feedback and encouragement to the other members of the group.

*'It was nice to have the means to tell my story from home Trinidad and Tobago. The ability to watch and develop my story and how it all came together and seeing it now put into themes.'*

All participants have submitted pieces of text for inclusion in the exhibition and book, ranging from descriptive prose and poetry to auto-biographical reflections and word sketches on the elements of gardens that inspire them. Their writing skills developed throughout the project, taking on board feedback and using this feedback to develop new ideas and the structure and style of their pieces. They learned about composition and how to make text more engaging, thinking about the reader and how they might be guided through the text.

***Aim four: to support participants in enhancing their listening skills by developing their ability to listen with empathy as they help others in the group to tell their story***

100% of participants felt that the workshops achieved this aim.

As outlined above, participants were supported in developing their active listening skills through small group exercises during workshops. Some participants also set up interviews with some of the people who help out in the YUMI garden, asking them questions about why they got involved in the garden, what they enjoy about the garden and what gardens have meant to them throughout their lives.

*'I took my seed and decided to plant it, along with the other writers that were there that evening. One of the tasks that we were given was to learn to listen, attentively, without interruptions, while each take turns telling a little story of his or her garden, memories as a child [...] It almost felt like therapy.'*

*'I enjoyed hearing and watching other writers develop there (sic) story with patience, developing each step into what it is now.'*

***Aim five: to help participants work from voice to text; learning how to record, transcribe and edit stories and/or interviews.***

75% of participants felt that the workshops achieved this aim. The remaining 25% worked from voice to text in discussing and then writing their own stories but were unable to conduct interviews due to time constraints caused by family and work commitments.

The writing group were keen to set up more interviews with people involved in the YUMI garden but this didn't prove possible given everyone's conflicting availability, which some participants found frustrating (whilst acknowledging that it can be difficult to find times to suit when everyone has other commitments).

***Aim six: to support participants in creating texts for the book about the YUMI garden.***

100% of participants felt the workshops achieved this aim.

As already mentioned, all participants have created a range of text pieces for inclusion in the book and are currently working on the selection of texts for inclusion in the two exhibitions scheduled to take place later this year.

Towards the end of the workshop and one-to-one sessions, Jenny supported the writers in focusing their attention specifically on the YUMI garden, the plants that grow there and the people who volunteer. The texts produced in response to this brief demonstrate the ways in which the writers each developed their own style and

highlight the range of different types of written work that they explored and developed during the earlier sessions.

To support the writers in creating texts specifically related to the YUMI garden, the photography group provided a large selection of photographs and each of the writers was asked to select photographs that caught their eye and captured their imagination and write about the thoughts, feelings and observations the photographs inspired.

*'The sessions obviously woke up the dormant (sic) sense of awareness of the beauty of gardens and the abundant foods that can be grown in little garden.'*

*'These four pictures show not only the blossoming garden as it was this summer and its produce but also illustrate a journey not only for me but for my daughter who joined YUMI earlier and was involved in some of the preparation and planting of the garden. She has blossomed too.'*

*They brought to mind not whole sentences and structure but words and phrases which I would like to share.*

*Abundant nature*

*Nature Life giving*

*Life giving food*

*Food sharing*

*Sharing experiences*

*Experiencing love*

*Love laughter*

*Laughter blossoming*

*Blossoming friendship*

*Friendship life enhancing*

*Life enhancing colour*

*Colour of life*

*Life's work*

*I felt all these things separately and at the same time about this garden and the journey.'*

As already mentioned, some of the writing group participants also carried out interviews with some of the people involved in the YUMI garden. These texts were transcribed with a lot of support from JZ and were then used by the book design group as they created their sample spreads.

### **2.2.2 Participants' Experience of the Sessions**

As with the photography group, all writing participants said that they enjoyed the sessions, with participants commenting on how much they enjoyed the chance to meet the others in the group and the people involved in the YUMI garden.

*'There was a really good community spirit'*

*'every body friendly and carrying (sic), different view from everybody'*

Participants were unanimous in praising Jenny's style of delivery and her flexible approach to structuring the sessions, to arranging individual meetings when they felt they needed additional support and the way in which she explained what some of them felt was a changing brief (in relation to the book) and supported them in creating and editing their texts.

*'JZ was there encouraging, when we felt like there was no more to write about.'*

*'JZ was really good in her execution of the project, in extracting information from us to bring it all together as much as we wanted. Setting rules to govern and run the group, creating focus points for the book project to keep it moving. Assisting us with construction of our stories, patiently keeping us motivated through to the end.'*

*'With JZ's constant support I felt confident'*

*'JZ facilitated the sessions very professionally and with a lot of patience. She has the ability to instill a lot of confidence in people and*

*made us all feel that everybody's work was important.'*

Similarly, the participants were unanimous in agreeing that communication from Jenny was excellent throughout the project, with emails before each session explaining what the session would be covering, notes on any preparation that needed to be done and what ideas to think about for discussion with the rest of the group. The group felt that Jenny was always on hand, either via phone or email, to answer any questions and give them support in developing their texts.

When asked if there was anything they felt they would have done differently had they been involved in delivering the project, some of the participants stated that they felt that the overall brief for the project, in particular in relation to the book and its contents, changed as the project progressed:

*'It was a good project, I think it will achieve what it was set out to achieve even though at times it was a bit fuzzy, the group discussed where we were and where we should be going.'*

*'I thought there was lack of clarity about the way book project overall was going to come together. Was made clearer right at end.'*

### **2.2.3 Links with the Photography Group**

As outlined in section 2.1.3, it proved difficult to schedule joint sessions of the two participant groups. As with the photographers, some of the writers stated that they would have found it useful to have more regular contact with the photographers. This was in particular relation to the links between their words and the images produced by the photography group – some participants felt that they would have liked to work with the photographers more to create pieces of text in direct response to some of the images produced and vice-versa. This was done to some extent towards the end of the project, when the writers selected images and wrote about what the images inspired in them.

## 2.2.4 Participant Outcomes

Four out of the five participants said that they felt really good about their work appearing in the book and exhibition:

*'I think it is great, and hopefully they get the message that I am trying to put out.'*

*'I don't know how to explain, but I am very, very happy!'*

The fifth participant said that she didn't feel personally that her work was of a high enough standard for publication as she feels that her work is of a more factual nature and therefore not as exciting as that created by 'romantics'.

60% of participants state that they now feel more confident in their creative writing skills:

*'My work surprised me. Even though it is not professional. I've learned technique to develop and expand my writing.'*

*'Not at all creative at beginning (sic), lots change now. I feel more confident, I have lots of things to write in my mind and I can write'*

Of those who said that they didn't feel more confident in their writing, one stated:

*'I still feel very creative, but sometimes become stuck in expressing it on paper.'*

And the final participant stated:

*'No change in my confidence in my writing but it was good to share concerns and issues with others'*

Similarly, the same 60% of participants would like to further develop their creative writing skills as a direct result of taking part in this project.

80% of participants said at the end of the project that their experience of this project means they are more likely to want to take part in future creative projects, with the fifth participant stating that she is as likely to get involved in other projects as she was at the outset.

As with the photography group, one of the participants is now involved in the York Mystery Plays, designing and making costumes. She says that she would never have had the confidence to get involved had it not been for her participation in this project.

Participants also commented on other outcomes. As with the photography group, several commented on how much they enjoyed the social aspect of the project and getting to meet people from a wide range of cultures and talk to them about how they ended up living in York and their cultural traditions and traditional food.

*'I enjoyed meeting people from other cultures with different tales to tell.'*

*'I got friendship and most importantly I realised that I do have some writing skills!'*

### **2.2.5 Facilitator's Experience of the Project**

At the outset of the project, Jenny said that she would like to develop her skills in the following ways:

- a new challenge is working with participants who may already have shared experiences and an established dynamic between them, and encouraging them to share deeper personal experiences creating an atmosphere of trust so that participants can tell their stories in the most authentic way possible
- listening with empathy and understanding
- creating a new dynamic among participants at the start of each session, with varied activities that will get them moving and interacting in new ways, followed by a more reflective

time in which they will be encouraged to communicate in an open way

- avoiding making assumptions and helping each participant to tell their story on their own terms, in the way that best suits their mood, their culture and their personality
- remaining calm and in control of the situation without being controlling, simply there to hold the space for the participants and help them bring out their story in an authentic way
- thinking of creative ways to encourage and motivate, making the whole experience fun and memorable, especially for those in the group who lack in confidence when it comes to speaking out or writing things down.

In relation to her first personal aim for the project, Jenny was under the impression at the outset that the writing group was an already established group of volunteers who had committed to taking part. However, some of the people who had initially put themselves forward to take part in the project at the very early planning stages were no longer able to participate due to other commitments and Jenny found herself helping to recruit participants. This meant that the project started with a smaller group than originally planned and that the individuals came with very different levels of motivation, confidence and expectation and without the sense of shared experiences and an established dynamic.

Jenny therefore found that she had to adopt a different type of energy and a different approach to working with the group, trying different techniques and styles of delivery to build their motivation and develop the group dynamic. Jenny wanted to ensure that the project was as participant-led as possible and used a range of techniques to help participants develop the confidence to lead discussions and to decide what direction they wanted to take their work in. As reflected in the feedback from participants, a very trusting and open atmosphere was created from the outset, with participants opening up and telling each other their stories. However, as numbers varied greatly from session to session, due to participants' family and work commitments and illness, Jenny found she had to be very flexible in her approach. Rather than working to a

very structured format where all of the participants developed as a group from one stage of writing to the next, Jenny established at an early stage that the most effective way to build participants' confidence and support them in developing their writing skills was to meet with them individually between group sessions and to maintain constant contact via phone and email.

During these individual sessions, and via email feedback, Jenny was able to help participants define which elements of gardens they wanted to explore in their work and support them in developing different styles of writing that reflected their individual creative responses to the theme.

Jenny feels that she was successful in using a range of activities to create a positive, supportive environment and encourage the writers to share their thoughts and ideas. This included physical warm up exercises and structured active listening activities at the beginning of each session. She was able to step back and understand how to get the balance right between pushing individuals to develop in a specific area and giving them the space to develop at their own pace. Jenny refrained from imposing her own direction on group discussions, enabling the participants to take the lead and feels that this helped in developing new skills and a new style of facilitation that she will be able to use in future projects.

Participants' confidence levels, in their language skills and creativity, varied hugely and Jenny found that they were focusing from the outset on the fact that they were aiming towards creating texts for publication and that this knocked their confidence levels. Several of the participants were very self-critical, feeling that their language and writing skills were inadequate and wanted to know from the outset how much text they were expected to create for the book, what themes it should focus on and what styles of writing they should use. This was reflected in participants' feedback, with several members of the group saying that they would have liked a clearer brief from the outset so that they knew exactly what they were working towards.

However, as with the photography group, Jenny felt that it was important that the participants, rather than focusing solely on creating text for publication, were given the space and support to freely explore their own creativity. To this end, Jenny spent a lot of time working with them, as a group and as individuals, supporting them in finding their own authentic voice and in becoming more focused on the stories they wanted to tell as opposed to the grammatical structure of their writing. She feels that she was successful in achieving this as the writers have all produced texts that were written from the heart and not simply for effect and feels that this was another important learning point – to trust in her process and her skills as a facilitator as the group all produced their own, individual authentic texts in the end.

Jenny feels that she was successful in remaining calm and in control of the situation, rather than being controlling (even when one session had to be held in one of the participants' cars as the caretaker hadn't shown up to open the venue!). This is reflected in the participants' feedback – they all commented on how patient and supportive she was and her ability to instill confidence in them.

Overall, Jenny feels that she has developed her skills further, and not in the ways she had initially expected. One of her personal highlights from the project was the evening when the group met in the YUMI garden at dusk, listening to the sounds of the garden and observing in silence while the participants made notes on their reflections on the garden. This sitting in comfortable silence was a good reflection on the atmosphere of trust that developed from an early stage. Another highlight was when Mona, one of the participants, shared her story of being a young girl in Bangladesh collecting water lily roots which her mother then cooked for breakfast. Mona doesn't feel particularly confident in her spoken or written English skills so to hear her talk openly to the group and share her story taught Jenny that it can sometimes be the participant who seems least able who transforms the most, given the right support and encouragement from the facilitator and the rest of the group.

## **2.3 Book Design Workshops**

### **2.3.1 Book Workshops Overview**

Two participants from each group plus the two facilitators attended four sessions with book designer Ned Hoste. These sessions were also attended by Sasiki, the YUMI Project Coordinator, as Ned thought it would be useful to have someone at the sessions with an overview of the history of the YUMI garden as well as someone who could have an overview of the next stages of the process and how best to manage them. One participant was unable to attend all sessions but was kept in the loop via email.

After the initial four sessions the group decided that they would like to have more time to work on their ideas for the book and a further three sessions with Ned were planned, plus one session where the group got together on their own. At the time of applying for funding, YUMI hadn't yet recruited Ned as the designer who would work on the project, meaning that a detailed discussion hadn't taken place around whether the aim of creating a book was achievable given the time and resources available. This was reflected in the decision to arrange additional sessions as it was agreed that the original aim of completing a book in such a small amount of time may have been over ambitious. It was agreed that, rather than aim to complete a whole book at this point in time, the group would instead focus their attention and effort on creating 25-30 sample spreads that would illustrate how the completed book might look and explore some of the themes that would be contained within it.

The design group members did a lot of additional work between sessions, with everyone making sample spreads by physically cutting and pasting images and text and two of the participants, who already had some experience of using the In Design software, trying out different layouts and styles. Participants and facilitators alike gave a lot of extra time to ensure that the resulting spreads were as professional as possible.

As outlined in the original project proposal, Karen and JZ attended the sessions as they felt that it was important to continue their

support for the process and participants, having worked so intensively with them up until this point. They were also keen to learn more about book design.

Participants learned a huge amount in a relatively short space of time, developing new skills and also developing the confidence to put these skills to use.

Skills learned by participants during the sessions include:

- Understanding of what thinking goes on before the book starts being created e.g. thinking about who your audience might be and how that might influence the style and layout and pace of your book
- How to go about selecting enough images for a book from a huge library and what criteria you need to apply to picture selection to get a balanced selection
- How you talk to an audience and what that audience needs to hear
- How books are placed in the bookshops – and how the bookshop categorization informs the contents of a book
- Technical and commercial restrictions – of what costs more in terms of paper, finishing and printing
- How different styles appeal to different audience
- How to pace a book and how to balance text and image in the pacing of the book
- How to identify themes from images and text
- How readers will experience the book – dip in to or read cover to cover – and how to engage the reader on the journey through the book
- Technical design knowledge needed to make a book, including a smattering of design history and typography – and how the old terminology is still used today
- Typeface and selection and basic typography
- How to start planning the design on paper, using sketches and physically cutting and pasting images and text and how to then apply these plans to design programmes – primarily InDesign
- How to put together sample spreads so set the style for the book

In this phase of the project, a relatively small group of participants had to go from learning design skills, understanding how to apply them and then putting them into action in a very short space of time in order to create the sample spreads for the book. As a result, this element of the project was less participant-led than the photography and writing workshops in that a smaller number of participants were involved and a lot of decisions around content, style and structure had to be taken in a short space of time. Those participants involved in the book design group were involved in a lot of discussion and exploration of ideas and themes and took a lot of decisions both during and between sessions but there wasn't the same time and space to explore the questions more broadly with all of the participants involved in the wider project as there had been in the photography and writing workshops. From the initial planning of the project, this book design group was always going to involve fewer numbers of participants.

The book design group, as with the original two groups, have achieved a huge amount. As outlined above, they have learned a wide range of new skills and successfully put these skills into practice through the creation of a series of sample spreads, the quality of which is incredibly high.

### **2.3.2 Facilitator's experience of the project**

Ned feels he's developed a greater understanding of how much of what he does is instinctive and that breaking that process down in order to communicate it to people who have never done it before has helped him in discussing some of these processes with his Indie author clients who are often in a similar position.

Ned gave the following statement on his experience of the project:

*One of the things that attracted me to get involved with the project was its spectacular ambition. Take a group of people who have never written for a book, a group of people who had never taken photographs for publishing and make a book.*

*It takes the usual model for creating a book and stands it on its head – usually you have the over-arching theme, usually a general plan for what the book is saying and the market it will talk to. By having two groups of contributors whose skills were being shaped it would have been impossible to put these in place without really restricting the creative and learning process.*

*I think the agreed outputs were ambitious but while developing the skills of the participants and finding out their levels of knowledge possibly over ambitious given the time – However far better to have a challenging goal to engage the participants rather than something which is too easily achieved.*

## **2.4 Project Outputs**

Outputs from the project included:

- A slideshow of images captured by the photography group, displayed at the YUMI Garden Open Day in September
- The individual portfolios created by participants
- An exhibition of photographs installed in the café at City Screen in York, with two more planned at the Spurriergate Centre and Ambiente.
- Unfortunately it wasn't possible to capture public feedback from the City Screen exhibition as it was hung in a very busy café space where there was nowhere to leave a visitor/comments book.  
YUMI has also had a request from a centre in Boston Spa who would like to exhibit some of the work created during this project as it reflects their principles of working collaboratively and having participants lead the creative process.
- Three features in the York Press – one in mid-summer, about the fact that the project was taking place plus two features on the City Screen exhibition
- 25 - 30 sample spreads for a book. (The original aim was to create a full book by the end of this initial project but as outlined in section 2.3, it was agreed that given the time and

resources available creating a range of sample spreads would be more achievable.)

## **2.5 Project Coordination**

### **2.5.1 Project Management**

As with the workshop facilitators, YUMI Project Coordinator Sasiki has given a lot more time to the project than originally anticipated. A lot of this additional time has been around meeting with people (participants and facilitators) and communicating by phone between sessions to help people think things through and decide on next steps. In addition, YUMI has been going through an intense period of organizational and strategic development, meaning that there were conflicting demands on her energy and time so they were pulled in different directions, between the organizational development work and project coordination. This sometimes led to a sense of pressure, which was at times picked up on by the facilitators and participants.

The project turned out to be a lot more complex than anticipated – participants’ conflicting commitments had an impact on how the project was delivered; the leap from the photography and writing workshops to the book design process involved a lot of intense skills development and a big time commitment from everyone involved; and the development of the brief for the book changed as time went on – the focus in the initial photography and writing workshops had to be on supporting participants in exploring their own creativity, whilst keeping an eye on the end goal of creating a book.

Over the summer fewer people were coming to volunteer in the garden on the days that the project took place meaning there weren’t as many opportunities to take photos of the people involved (this was coupled with the fact that a lot of the writers and photographers had selected particular elements of the garden that inspired them and these didn’t always involve people). The decision was taken to set up photo and interview opportunities to capture more images and texts for the book but these took a while to pull together owing to everyone’s conflicting commitments and availability.

In the original project plan, the design, planning and installation of the exhibition was to have been led by the book design team. However, as the design team wasn't yet fully formed at the time when the exhibition had to be planned, Karen led on the process, as the person with the most experience in this area. Members of the photography group helped out when they were able to commit time. This meant a lot of additional work, which Karen was more than happy to do, but added significantly to her in kind contribution to the project.

The original plan also aimed to have staged three exhibitions by this point in time. The first exhibition was installed at City Screen in York for a month in December and two further exhibitions, at the Spurriergate Centre and Ambiente, a tapas restaurant, are planned for later in 2012. Ambiente have said that they would like to accompany the exhibition with some special dishes created using produce from the YUMI garden, meaning that the exhibition there has been put back to the summer in order to ensure that there will be enough produce to create the special menu. This decision to stage the second and third exhibitions later than originally planned has meant that there is now more time for the writers to get more involved in submitting texts for exhibition and in planning the exhibition itself.

### **2.5.2 Marketing and Publicity**

The original marketing plan for the project was developed with members of the YUMI publicity group, a group of enthusiastic young volunteers who had been involved in creating marketing and publicity materials for the organization. Unfortunately, as the project progressed, members of the group were less able to commit time and energy to the project due to personal circumstances including completing Masters theses and heavy work commitments.

This meant that this element of the project delivery was something else that Sasiki and the two facilitators had to give a lot more time to than originally anticipated. All three were involved in media activities

(writing press releases, meeting journalists) and Sasiki found herself coordinating media and VIP invitations to the Open Day in September, coordinating media interviews with local press, pulling together regular e-newsletters and regularly updating the YUMI Twitter feed and Facebook page.

The project has been successful in attracting local media attention, with three features in the York Press, as outlined in section 2.4.

YUMI has recently appointed a volunteer publicity coordinator who plans to revamp the organization’s website, further develop YUMI’s social network and media presence and create a marketing and publicity strategy, with clear aims and milestones and targeted media campaigns, which will include the two exhibitions to be staged later this year.

### **2.5.3 Garden Facilitator’s role**

Helen Hays, the Facilitator for the YUMI Garden, has supported the project throughout. At the outset, she met with participants and gave them a tour of the garden, explaining the history behind the project, telling them about what happens in an allotment in terms of the life cycles of the crops that grow there and the work involved in creating and maintaining healthy crops and she introduced them to the volunteers who work in the garden.

Helen was instrumental in planning the garden Open Day in September, where there were lots of opportunities for the project participants to capture images and talk to people about the garden. She also helped to set up photo opportunities – letting the photographers know when particular crops were going to be planted or harvested – and helped to set up interviews with some of the garden volunteers.



As the photography sessions were held in the teaching room in the garden (which is where a lot of the tools and materials are stored), Helen said that it meant she had to be well organized in terms of getting all of the tools and equipment ready before the photographers arrived each week so as not to disturb the session, and that she was often involved in clearing up the room at the end of the session.

She said that it was really nice to have the photographers there every week, adding to the sense of community, but one downside was that some of the photography participants were also regular garden volunteers and were unable to work in the garden while attending the sessions.

Helen hasn't been involved in detailed discussions around the book design sessions and would love to get involved if the decision is taken to develop the project further and work towards publication of a book. She feels that it's really important that any book produced should reflect the spirit of the garden and the community of people involved and acknowledge all of the individuals who contribute so much. Helen would like some of the garden volunteers to be involved in these discussions too and believes they would have a lot to contribute. She really likes the idea of including things like extracts from the garden journal (updated every week by the people who volunteer with drawings, an outline of the jobs that have been done that week and comments and observations – often in several languages) and the garden dictionary/glossary (where participants write the names of crops, tools etc in their own languages) as well as recipes created by the YUMI cooks, who use produce from the garden. She also likes the idea of including more interviews and introducing an oral history element to the project, helping the people involved in the garden to tell their fascinating stories.

A really positive outcome for Helen would be if the exhibitions and book inspire new people to come along to the garden and get involved, tying in with YUMI's strategic aims of encouraging more people from BME groups to get involved and raising the organization's profile to York residents and local organizations.

### 3 Conclusions

**3.1** The project worked with fifteen participants, representing seven different cultural backgrounds, and in excess of fifty sessions were delivered (including one-to-one sessions, photo opportunities in the garden and at events and the interviews conducted with garden volunteers). Dozens more people have been indirectly involved, having their photographs taken, talking to participants about their involvement in the garden, helping with publicity and with coordinating events.

In terms of project outcomes, participants have all learned a wide range of skills and have developed confidence in their creativity, with 87% stating that they feel more confident in their creative skills than they did at the start of the project (the remaining 13% felt as confident as they did at the outset). 82% of participants say that taking part in this project has made them more likely to want to take part in other arts activities in the future (with the remaining 18% stating that they are as likely to take part now as they were before).



Participants have spoken with real warmth about the sense of community and sharing that they felt throughout the project and were unanimous in praising the facilitators for the way in which they created an atmosphere

of trust and openness, where participants felt supported and confident in exploring their creative ideas.

The facilitators involved in delivering the project have all developed new skills and new approaches to delivery that they will build into their future working practice. The project participants came from a range of cultural backgrounds and with varied levels of confidence in their participation in open group discussions, meaning that the

sensitivity and skills of the facilitators were critical in ensuring that all participants felt fully involved and had the confidence to share their thoughts and ideas.

The participants have created an incredible body of work, the quality and range of which has far exceeded expectations, and they and the facilitators are justifiably very proud of what they've achieved.

**3.2** A wide range of outputs have come out of the project, from the individual portfolios of work created by participants, to the exhibition staged in City Screen and the sample book spreads, with more outputs to come in the two further exhibitions to be staged later this year.

It was decided that the initial aim, that of creating a completed book at the end of the project, was perhaps over ambitious given the time and resources available and that the book design group would instead create a range of sample spreads. These spreads showcase the extremely high standard of work created by participants, highlight the skills learned by the book design group members and give a flavour of what the finished book could look like, which will prove useful in discussing the further development of the project with participants and the wider YUMI community.

**3.3** The project has also been successful in achieving the following, broader aims:

- Providing a wider range of unusual and inspiring opportunities to become involved in arts-based activities
- Developing participants' skills and confidence through activities, training and mentoring  
Encouraging more people from BME groups to get involved
- The final broader aim was that of 'Raising our profile to York residents and local organizations. It has been difficult to assess the direct impact that this project has had in this area, as opposed to, say, the garden Open Day where large numbers of people visited the garden for the first time. Unfortunately it wasn't possible to have a visitor book at the City Screen exhibition to capture comments and feedback as

it's a very busy café with no spare shelf space on which a book could have been left.

In terms of YUMI's overarching aims and objectives, this project has also been successful in:

- significantly strengthening the sense of confidence and belonging in people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups in York;
- positively influencing attitudes to difference and diversity

This was reflected in the feedback given by participants, who talked about how much they have grown in confidence as a result of taking part in this project and being supported by the facilitators as well as about how much they learned about other cultures from the other participants and the people involved in the garden.

**3.4** The project was a lot more complex than originally envisaged, meaning that the facilitators, project coordinator and participants all invested a lot more time than initially expected. The value of the in kind contributions from facilitators and the YUMI Project Coordinator comes to more than £30,000. This time was given willingly but it did result in all those involved feeling under pressure at times.

**3.5** On reflection, and given feedback from participants and facilitators, the project could have been structured differently, with more joint sessions involving both groups. This would have ensured a shared understanding of and commitment to the overall vision for the project, more sharing of works in progress, and more opportunities for participants from different groups to collaborate (e.g. for a writer to talk to a photographer about the text they are creating and the images they would like to accompany it and vice-versa). That said, the participants in this project all came from very different starting points and therefore needed the time, space and support to develop their skills to a stage where they felt comfortable putting their work into a more public arena.

While some participants felt that they would have preferred to have a clear brief for the book from the outset, a detailed brief would have

restrained their creative freedom, which was vital in supporting them to develop their skills and confidence. There was some difference between the feedback given by the writers and photographers: the photographers discussed the 'happy accidents' that they learned from but this doesn't tend to happen with writing; writing is a very personal and exposing activity and some of those taking part in the writing group are people who don't always feel comfortable with the tools at their disposal for communication, which makes it all the more impressive that all writers have created honest, moving texts for inclusion in the exhibition and book.

## **4 Recommendations**

**4.1** As a next step, YUMI should hold a planning session, involving as many participants as possible and the project facilitators plus Helen, the Garden Coordinator, and some of the garden volunteers, to devise a plan for taking the idea of a book forward. The session should include discussions around: the project undertaken to date and its successes and learning points; what form the participants would like the book to take, who they see as its audience and what themes they would like to structure it around; willingness and availability of those involved so far to carry on their involvement with the next phase of the project; possible funding streams, to include public funding, trusts and foundations and commercial partnerships; a plan for taking the ideas forward, including timescales and an outline of roles and responsibilities – at least one participant has expressed an interest in learning more about how to develop community-based projects so there could be opportunities for participants to develop new skills in project planning and fundraising (there may also be opportunities for further shared learning e.g. participants learning from each other around design techniques, participants learning interview techniques to capture the stories of more of the people involved in the garden etc). This would ensure that the project was participant-led from the outset, closely aligned with YUMI's core aim of engaging participants in planning and leading community activities.

Photographer Karen Lennox has already said that, due to other work commitments, she wouldn't be able to work on a next phase of this project, so thought would have to be given as to how the photography elements of the project would be delivered and led.

**4.2** If the decision is taken to work on the further development of the book idea, YUMI should ensure that all key personnel are signed up from the outset, before funding applications are made, to ensure that aims and expectations are realistic given the resources available and that all are agreed on the vision, aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes for the project from the outset.

**4.3** As good practice, once all key personnel are on board, YUMI should agree job descriptions and roles and responsibilities with project facilitators from the outset and issue contracts outlining the agreed roles.

**4.4** In future projects where two groups are working at the same time towards a common goal, YUMI should plan at least one combined session at the start of the project so that all participants have a shared understanding of the vision and aims from the outset and to support the development of ongoing links between the two groups. Participants and facilitators could work together at the start of the project to establish protocol for ensuring that the groups communicate regularly and are able to share and review their work in progress and jointly agree on any changes to the overall vision for the project and its outcomes and outputs. One solution may be to schedule both groups to meet at the same time in the same venue, although this may be limited by the availability of participants and facilitators.

**4.5** For future projects of this scale and nature, YUMI should look to appoint a project manager who will take responsibility for ensuring the smooth running of the project and regular feedback to the YUMI Project Coordinator, Projects Forum and Management Group. This would enable the YUMI Project Coordinator to focus her time and attention on the strategic and operational development of the organization and would ensure that there was someone dedicated solely to managing all aspects of the project, from participant

recruitment through to delivery planning, project communication, coordinating project outputs and marketing and PR.

**4.6** For future projects, YUMI should ensure that there are means in place to capture the broader public impact of the project, aligned to the organizational aims, objectives and outcomes stated at the outset. For example, if exhibitions are held in the future, a comments/visitors book or some other way of capturing public feedback should be in place wherever possible. This will enable YUMI to measure whether its organizational objectives, for example 'increasing public awareness of cultural diversity in York' have been achieved alongside the achievement of participant-focused objectives and outcomes.

## **5 Methodology**

Evaluation was built into the project from the outset, with the evaluator attending planning meetings and workshop sessions and initial questionnaires ascertaining the participant's individual aims for the project and establishing their previous involvement in creative activities and levels of experience in writing and photography.

Interviews were carried out with the three facilitators, the YUMI project coordinator and the garden facilitator. In addition case study interviews were conducted, looking in greater detail at the experiences of three of those involved in the project as participants.

Five participants attended a focus group session at the end of the initial series of photography and writing workshops and a further four participants discussed their involvement in the project at the launch of the City Screen exhibition.

73% of participants completed online questionnaires that explored: their experience of taking part in the project; the skills they have developed and whether the project has inspired them to further develop these skills in the future; the way in which the facilitators

planned and delivered the project; whether they would have made any changes to the way in which the project was delivered; project communication; the impact on their confidence; their feelings on the work they created throughout the project; and the likelihood of them taking part in other creative activities in the future.

In total, twenty people have contributed to this evaluation.

