

darts



Case Study

Lucy's Traineeship with darts

Trainee Case Study – Lucy’s Experience

Traineeships at darts

darts is a leading organisation and centre of excellence for participatory arts, with a local and national reputation for delivering high-quality creative activity that responds to immediate need. Scores of artists have begun their career with us as trainees, paid interns or through peer mentoring programmes. With the positive impacts of participatory arts on health, wellbeing and education more accepted and valued than ever, specialist facilitators are needed now more than ever.

Aligning with Levelling Up priorities for the North of England and fulfilling the need to build a strong workforce of talented, passionate artists with a diverse and flexible skillset, darts’ ambitious traineeship programme equips local artists with the tools to expand the scope of their practice, whilst growing the essential pool of talented arts facilitators in the North. darts traineeships provide passionate artists with the opportunity to grow their practice and gain insightful experience into community arts – such as co-design, delivery, project management and working with a wide range of participants, including some of the most vulnerable people in the community.

Trainees first observe a range of experienced participatory artists leading sessions with different groups, with opportunities to discuss their approach, way of working, and chosen art form – whether that be visual arts, music, drama or dance. As the traineeship progresses, candidates are supported to design and deliver short activities within sessions, eventually being supported to lead a while session with a group.

Traineeships are paid and provide artists with the unique opportunity of working alongside professionals in one of the UK’s largest participatory, and award-winning, arts charities. The traineeships are designed to fit around candidates’ individual practice and other responsibilities, enabling them to learn, develop and grow their practice as a valued member of the darts team, alongside existing commitments.

Lucy’s darts journey

Lucy began her journey at The Point as a participant in 2017. In her fight to recover from mental illness and addiction, she made the decision to move back to her hometown of Doncaster. Lucy’s Dad recommended that she attend Creative Directions at The Point – our free, weekly arts programme for adults experiencing mental ill-health. Lucy began to attend sessions – tentatively at first – and became a regular and enthusiastic participant as the weeks went on:

“In 2017, after being in psychiatric hospital, I came back to live with my parents in Doncaster, because I couldn’t look after myself anymore, I’d become a danger to myself.”

“I remember being amazed that it [The Point] had been around for so long, but I’d not lived in Doncaster for so many years. I remember coming to Creative Directions on a Thursday morning... and I could only stay for a little bit because of extreme anxiety...and I could only stay for those couple of hours, then eventually I started to build my time up.”

Lucy told us that coming to Creative Directions as a participant enabled her to reconnect with her natural creativity and love of art, having grown up in a creative household. Moreover, with experience in her previous career as a Nursery Manager, getting involved in creative activity with others came naturally to her. When a darts artist delivered a block of textile workshops for Creative Directions sessions, Lucy found that she was drawn in, being able to work with a medium she was comfortable with, and began staying for both the morning and afternoon sessions held at The Point.

“I’d always been very creative from being young... it was a part of my life, although it wasn’t my chosen art form until recent years. It was something that I always used in my work, but I worked with children so that was my chosen career path.”

Lucy told us that The Point has always been a special place to her. As a participant in recovery from mental ill-health and addiction, Lucy found the calm, creative environment of the building an essential aspect of her artistic progression and journey towards recovery.

“I found it a really peaceful place... the sun used to beam through the window and I often just used to come and sit... It’s a place that helped me to manage my life, I suppose. With the chaos in my head, being in a calm environment really did help.”

From participant to volunteer

As Lucy became more involved as a participant at The Point, and more confident in her sense of self, she found that becoming a volunteer seemed like a natural progression. Having worked with children and young people in her previous career, volunteering on darts’ Arts & Education programmes enabled Lucy to bring her experience and creativity together, whilst learning more about participatory arts delivery.

“It was just a natural step, because the severity of my illness really meant that I had to take baby steps in doing things because I’d damaged my brain and my body so much. It just seemed to flow. And Sophie [darts’ Volunteer Coordinator] was so gentle... she was always very encouraging.”

Lucy told us that, as the Covid-19 pandemic hit, being involved with darts and The Point helped her through an extremely difficult time. Having begun to develop her practice as an artist in her own right prior to the pandemic, Lucy found that her close ties with darts, even from home, really helped to support her through the lockdowns. As both a participant and volunteer, Lucy felt supported and surrounded by community, even when lockdowns prevented her from meeting with participants, artists and volunteers.

“Covid came, along with lockdowns, so I came back as a participant because of my own mental ill health, and needed to get back into the community environment that I’d previously been in. But during that time we had online volunteers’ meetings too, so there was still that connection – it was really important.”

Lucy's traineeship experience

As Lucy regained her confidence and returned regularly to The Point as a volunteer and participant, she started making more connections to other artists and creatives in Doncaster. She joined the new Doncaster Creative Network, secured a studio, and began to really develop her practice. When the opportunity to apply for a traineeship came up, applying seemed like a huge next step in her creative journey. Lucy successfully applied to darts' traineeship programme, running from January – March 2023. She told us that, at first, uncertainty and a lack of confidence meant that she was hesitant to apply, yet saw the traineeship as a unique opportunity and a natural progression.

"It just seems to be 'this is the place that I am meant to be'. So, when the traineeship came up, it was something that I'd always wished would happen."

Lucy's personal and artistic development

Throughout the traineeship period, candidates work alongside darts' team of highly-skilled and experienced professional artists – observing, learning and taking part in participatory arts practice and delivery. At first, Lucy found the process of sharing her practice and traineeship experience to be challenging, as it meant that she had to confront insecurities and share her process, yet found it to be a valuable and empowering experience, too.

"At first... there was that real struggle of the belief that I'm an artist, that that's something I can do, my confidence was there in what I produced but not there in myself. I've had to be vulnerable through the process of that and risk being seen, and I think that's what this experience of the traineeship has been about: I could no longer hide away."

By working in a creative environment which actively responds to participant experience, and by working alongside other artists, trainees are encouraged to develop their own work as well as gain personal experience. Lucy told us that, as her creative practice grew under the traineeship, so did her feelings of confidence and self-esteem.

"It's made me a lot more confident in myself and my abilities, and what I can bring to a session. With my mental health and previous addictions... my ego has always been less than... So having been around other artists and especially running a workshop at the end of my traineeship, meant having ...necessary validation from other people, that they would want to do something like that."

Throughout the traineeship, candidates record their learning and experience in a journal, which takes the form they feel best suits their working style. As well as providing a record of their learning and discovery session-to-session and week-to-week, it also means that they complete the traineeship with a valuable resource which documents their findings and understanding of participatory arts delivery – which then informs their independent practice as an artist moving forwards.

"[It] felt overwhelming at first because we had to do a journal and I struggle cognitively, but I spoke about it and then I just thought, this is not going to happen again."

Lucy told us that the unique design of the darts traineeship meant that she could shape the experience to suit her needs as an artist, allowing her to learn about participatory arts delivery whilst working in a team alongside fellow trainees and learning from professional facilitators at the same time.

“I thought, ‘this is what I need to get from this, which will be different for the others, so just do it. It’s such an experience.’”

Moving forward

Lucy found that the traineeship provided her with the chance to learn new skills and meet new people, leading to further creative opportunities as an artist, and extending the impact of the traineeship. Lucy told us that being involved in darts has opened up new avenues to explore as an artist and Doncaster resident, which will further develop her practice in the future; she still regards The Point as a base.

“I think it [The Point] adds to Doncaster. I think that from me coming here as a participant, it’s opened lots of different doors. I’m on the Festival of Light steering group for Right Up Our Street [Doncaster’s Arts Council Funded People and Places project]... but I’ve always come back to here.”

Some final thoughts...

“Even though the end product of being a facilitator is the same, everybody’s journey is totally led by their own interest, by their character. I think that darts is such an inclusive setting, and staff team as well, that it gives everybody the space just to flow... Under the traineeship, I’ve been able to grow so that I can go out into Doncaster and do so many other things, but it’s all because of here...”