

darts



Case Study

Janet's Traineeship with darts

Trainee Case Study – Janet’s Story

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 now more valued than ever, there is a rapidly growing need for specialist facilitators who can deliver this work.

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, artists are supported to design and deliver short activities within sessions, eventually being supported to lead a whole session with a group. darts’ traineeships are paid and 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.

Janet’s darts story – age 16

Although Janet has always been creative, she came to discover her love and talent for visual arts through an unconventional route. Janet told us that as a child, she was an avid dancer, having watched dance on her favourite TV programmes and wanting to emulate what she saw. When she was 14, Janet’s family were able to send her to a performing arts academy, where she took her dancing to a higher level, and discovered modelling and performance. She remembers attending a dance class at The Point when she first began her dance journey.

“I did all kinds of modelling and danced in fashion shows. I travelled all over the country doing that and eventually ended up doing the choreography in stage productions”

Janet told us that she loved having a creative career, but when a knee injury cut short her profession as a dancer she turned to working in healthcare. She said that, although it was a challenging environment, she found real joy in working with people and building up positive relationships in a setting that focused on wellbeing. Then the Covid-19 pandemic hit and at the same time, Janet experienced a serious health scare.

“I did dancing and I’ve always drawn... so the artist has always been there. And then the pandemic happened, and I had a health scare – I’d gone from being a really healthy person to being in hospital in a really bad way.”

Janet told us that this had a severe impact on her mental health, and it was amidst these challenges that she turned to visual arts as an escape, finding joy in painting with colour and abstract forms. Taking part in online art workshops over lockdown improved Janet's knowledge and skill of painting, and she began to feel the transformative impact of making art, soon realising that it could positively impact others too.

"I thought: 'I can do this for other people. This is good for me, it saved me, and it really helped me escape from all this [mental health difficulty] and it makes me calm. I want to give that joy to people – it's liberating, and I think there's a value in it that often isn't taken seriously enough."

Finding darts again - solo exhibition 2023

Having pursued her visual arts practice coming out of lockdown, and completing her first solo exhibition in 2021, Janet became rooted in Doncaster's rapidly growing creative scene. She told us that when the opportunity to apply for a traineeship at darts came about through Doncaster Creative network, she jumped at the chance. For Janet, the possibility of a traineeship based at The Point brought her creative journey full circle:

"I came here [The Point] many years ago, for a breakdancing workshop, and a friend of mine was doing some workshops in here... I hadn't expected to come back, but I'd always thought about this place, a little nugget of goodness – there's a calm about the place."

Janet successfully applied for the trainee position, running from January – March 2023. Janet told us that she was thrilled to have the opportunity to develop her practice and begin her journey in participatory arts. For Janet as an artist, and with a background in healthcare as well as creativity, the chance to bring her experience together through participatory arts training at darts was an exciting prospect.

"I went through the application process and I realised I was actually starting to do what I set out to do – help people. The traineeship and darts' values really seemed to align with why I do what I do."

Janet's development as an artist

Having come to her visual arts practice through such a non-linear route and learning as she went, Janet told us that being accepted onto the traineeship programme brought an important sense of validation to her work, building her confidence as an artist. As a Doncaster resident, and with darts' work firmly rooted in Doncaster and designed around local needs, Janet found that the traineeship enabled her to be part of a mission close to her heart, that aligned with her values and goals as an artist.

"Thinking back now, it's given me a clarity and that certainty: I do make art for mental health and to give people happiness, to give joy in life. It's grey in Doncaster, and we need to do something – so I know I'm doing the right thing."

Janet told us that, at first, she found the traineeship challenging. The programme is designed to push the boundaries of the artists' practice, whatever their medium, and introduce them to new ways of making and sharing art with participant in settings and situations they may not have encountered before.

“Going through the traineeship – it was a lot of information to take in, and then having my own expectations... trying to shake them off was especially difficult for me because of ADHD, and having these unrealistic expectations that aren’t really placed upon you by anyone but yourself.”

Janet told us that, despite these challenges, she felt she was in a nurturing environment and that the support network offered by darts staff helped her to overcome a lack of confidence. This enabled her to learn and grow as an artist, providing her with the clarity she needed to take her work in new directions.

“It took me aback to be surrounded by very likeminded people – it’s given me a clarity. Firstly, my talent and my gift and what I can do – being given permission to know that I can do this. You’re being championed here.”

Learning through others

All of darts’ work is participant-led, and artists use co-design to develop new and innovative techniques that directly respond to participant need. The traineeship programme places strong emphasis on collaborative working, co-design and co-delivery. For Janet, being able to observe and co-deliver sessions was instrumental in developing her practice and mindset around participatory art.

“Moony and Karen [regular darts artists] are absolutely involved in who they’re talking to and the group at the same time. Giving what’s necessary and not overloading the participants with information – they make it really interactive. It’s a relationship you’re building within the workshop.”

Janet told us that, whilst she has always had a passion and a natural talent for working with people, her tendency had been to come up with projects that were too complex. In observing and working alongside darts’ experienced facilitators, Janet learnt how to take a step back and place the participant at the centre of activity. The completion of the traineeship sees candidates design and deliver their own workshop independently. Building on what she had learnt from darts’ artists, Janet delivered a visual arts workshop which participants told us was successful, joyful and had real value.

Opening up opportunities

Having grown her confidence and skills through the traineeship, Janet told us that working with darts has opened up new avenues of creativity. In taking part in the traineeship, and designing and delivering workshops, Janet’s passion for participatory arts has flourished and led her to set up her own business running workshops based around colour and joy.

“I’m developing Love Joy Colour workshops as their own entity, and it all stems from that workshop I did at the end of the traineeship. People just creating for the sheer pleasure of it.”

Some final words...

“It’s awesome. I think it’s completely necessary. Without colour, what is there? Without kind-hearted-individuals and well-meaning individuals coming together collectively and doing good, what is there? That bundle of energy is then leaving with participants, and they’re bringing it along with them in their day. It’s a positive energy that should be championed... it’s valuable.”