

darts



Case Study

Grace's Journey as an Artist

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Traineeships at darts

darts is the largest participatory arts charity in the UK, each year offering accessible inspiring creative activities to thousands of people across Doncaster to improve life, learning and health. Fulfilling the need for a strong workforce of talented, passionate artists with a diverse and flexible skillset, and aligning with Levelling Up priorities for the North, 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 practitioners locally. 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 at-risk members in the community.

Traineeships are paid and provide artists with the unique opportunity of working alongside professional participatory arts facilitators with diverse arts practices. 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, and their own creative ambitions.

Grace's Journey

Grace began her journey as a drama artist when she was in school. Growing up in a working-class family in Castleford, Grace told us that there were few opportunities to access arts and culture, let alone have a creative practice of her own. Going to university to study Theatre and Performance, Grace said that she had to overcome many barriers to earn a place on her course and that, despite being passionate about her degree and her experience, it was difficult to find her place in a cohort where she was the only person from her background.

“Most of the people on my course were very well-off, and came from really rich families. They couldn't understand me, not even acknowledging that I was there. I had to change my accent for them to understand what I was saying...”

Finding Community Arts

Grace told us that the first time she truly found solidarity and community within her drama practice was when she joined a theatre company working to raise the profile of working-class voices in professional theatre. This was also where she was first introduced to community arts.

“Starting to work in community arts, I loved it. It did feel very natural – a sense of community is quite heavy in working-class areas because you don't have the money, so all you have is each other... that is encapsulated especially in community arts.”

Joining darts

Grace said that coming to Doncaster really resonated with her: local areas reminded her of home, and residents' stories aligned with her own. When she saw the opportunity for a traineeship, she felt her values really matched with darts', and was excited by the opportunity to grow, building upon her experience through a dedicated framework of development.

"The reason that I love community arts so much is because I never had anything like that... when I go into nurseries and I see levels of deprivation, it's strange because I think, "was I one of those kids?"

As a fierce advocate for equal access to the arts, Grace told us that working with darts enabled her to stand for what she believed in:

"Allowing them [participants] to have experiences with art, without having to pay for it, is something that will always drive my practice."

Despite being initially nervous about the traineeship, Grace soon found her feet and felt supported, welcomed and valued from the start. She told us that it took her some time to build confidence in herself as she began something new, but said that she was always made to feel comfortable and that any of her anxieties were listened to.

"Any worries that I had – as a freelancer, as an artist – Janet [darts mentor] took care of."

An Introduction to Early Years

When she began the Tuneful Chatter traineeship, Grace said she was nervous and unsure of what to expect. After delivering to Learning Disabled adults and older people, Early Years work presented a new, but a compelling challenge, and an exciting opportunity to engage with new audiences.

As well as providing her with new techniques to embed with sessions engaging a diverse range of participants, Grace said that working in Early Years settings drew out personal qualities that she could build into her work: ***"I'm quite childlike and playful as a person, and this has allowed me to embed that within my practice more confidently."***

Grace told us that this has also impacted other areas of her creative practice. Co-delivery across different art forms, and child-centred approaches to sessions helped her to build a toolkit that she could draw across projects within, and external to, her work with darts.

"I've used children's warm-ups in adult's directing sessions. Pulling the playfulness and the improvisation in child-led work is so playful, and it can really benefit the rest of my practice."

Developing Professional Practice

For Grace, the innovative offer of Tuneful Chatter – combining movement, music and drama – played to new strengths and enabled her to expand her professional practice in new directions. Although she had some training in dance and musical performance, Grace had, in previous experiences, only been encouraged to deliver drama work. With the Tuneful Chatter traineeship, she began to explore new techniques and joyfully embedded them into her practice.

“With other experiences that I’ve had, I’d just been shoved into drama. But now the sessions I design on my own are more focused around dance and music... I want to embed it more, and experiment. I developed breadth of skills and I got to see how everyone works.”

Alongside developing her professional practice, Grace told us that the traineeship was pivotal in her personal growth, too. Her confidence grew significantly. Grace said that the traineeship provided her with an essential toolkit as a freelancer and creative practitioner – gaining an understanding of how to pursue a career in the creative industry after studying at university and having no role model to look up to when she was younger.

“I never knew how to be professional as an artist as your creative practice is so embedded into who you are. But working with darts, it’s such a lovely company to work for, I now know how to hold myself and feel more confident in how I want to be perceived as a professional.”

From Trainee to Core Artist

Through the traineeship, Grace was supported to grow and develop her approach to community engagement and participatory arts delivery. Completing the traineeship successfully, equipped with a huge range of knowledge and skills, Grace was invited to join the team as a professional facilitator, designing and delivering her own sessions. She told us that the support and training she received at darts enabled and inspired her to overcome the barriers she has faced throughout her career as a theatre practitioner, achieving her dream as an artist.

“I never thought that would happen, especially at this age [22]. To go straight from graduating to having this opportunity... darts is so fairly paid it has given me the start - both financially and career-wise - that I can now take the leap and go full-time doing what I love... I’m actually living my dream.”

Some final words

“My Tuesdays with Alex were always so much fun. Like two fireworks – being able to bounce off people with such positive, similar values, and that are a bit further ahead in their career so I can see that it’s possible. I’d only ever met people that were really far ahead or on my level, so there’s no one that’s in between. To see people doing so well in that in-between stage is really nice.”

“Imagination. That’s what’s at the heart of art. Children have so much unfiltered imagination and I will definitely use that and put it into other pieces, because unfiltered imagination is where all the big ideas come from.”