

Grant Report:

January – August 2016

The Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust

"It has been the most wonderful experience of my life...I'm totally inspired. The time and space given to dedicate to writing in an idyllic quiet location made this week, perfect."
Grant recipient 2016

Arvon is extremely grateful to the Trustees of The Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust for their ongoing support of our Grants Scheme. We value the relationship with the Trust highly and are thrilled that the Trustees have decided to increase their annual contribution from £5,000 to £6,000 enabling more writers facing disadvantaged and challenging lives the opportunity to participate in an Arvon course.

Impact on grant beneficiaries

By the end of the year, Arvon will have delivered over 80 courses across our three rural centres developing writers' skills in a variety of forms, ranging from Fiction to Poetry, Playwriting to TV Screenwriting. We have awarded over 125 grants to disadvantaged writers so far this year, with a limited number of grants still available. Your increased support this year will provide around 15 writers from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to develop their writing and potential. Below are two individuals who have benefited from your generous support to date:

One beneficiary from Leeds received a grant to attend a memoir writing course in May. The course was led by Guardian journalist Hannah Pool and Sathnam Sanghera, whose novels were twice shortlisted for the Costa Book Awards in 2008 and 2013. Following a prolonged period of ill health and mental health difficulties, the participant found herself homeless and residing in mental health assisted accommodation, awaiting a council property. 'Without this grant I would not have been able to afford it and I would not be sitting here, still overwhelmed at how amazing my experience was. I really do believe that it's been life changing; I have a new found confidence in my writing'. She found the supportive atmosphere on the course had not only reignited her passion for writing but also boosted her self-esteem: 'It's made a huge difference in the way I see my writing. I have come home a better writer, more inspired, encouraged and enthused to keep on going at a time when I had lost hope and all confidence in my writing...Attending the course has made me feel like I can achieve anything: a huge thank you!'

A beneficiary from London was awarded a grant to attend a course writing Children and Young Adult Fiction in June. The course was led by children's author Malachy Doyle and Narinder Dhama, who wrote the novelisation of the film Bend it like Beckham. The participant suffers from a respiratory illness and following an operation in early 2015 was unable to work for much of last year. She applied hoping that the course would provide her with a much needed boost in confidence in her writing. She benefited greatly from the daily one-to-one tutorials where Malachy and Narinder offered feedback and guidance on the redrafting of her young adult novel: 'I now feel I am better equipped to

complete my novel...It is safe to say that without this course I would not feel confident in approaching agents/publishers or even entering competitions'. At the end of the week she commented: 'I cannot fully express what Arvon means to me, it's been magical and exciting...I would not have been able to be part of this wonderful journey had it not been for the grant, so thank you.'

Recent Achievements of Grant Recipients

The Grants Scheme has a proven track record in supporting writers at the beginning of their careers with many achieving recognition for their writing. One such writer, Wyl Menmuir received a grant in 2012 to attend a Starting to Write course. Wyl was profiled in our 2012 report to The Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust. His debut novel, *The Many*, was released by Salt Publishing in June. We are delighted to report that last month *The Many* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

The following two Arvon alumni and grant recipients have gained notable accolades for their writing and have returned to Arvon this year as tutor and guest reader. Course participants are particularly inspired by those tutors whose writing journey they can relate to and learn from.

Andrew McMillan received a grant to attend a poetry course in 2011. He described the impact the course had on his writing: 'The challenges of the week really helped me to mature and grow as a writer and I feel I made a huge step forward'. In 2015, his debut collection *Physical*, was published and became the first ever poetry collection to win The Guardian First Book Award. The collection included 'protest of the physical'; a long poem Andrew began writing four years earlier on the Arvon course. *Physical* was shortlisted for the 2016 International Dylan Thomas prize, Costa Poetry Award 2015 and the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. In July, Andrew returned to Arvon as a guest on a Starting to Write course, alongside the poet Adam O'Riordan, who had also received a grant back in 2004.

Jessica Swale was awarded a grant to attend a playwriting course in 2012. Whilst on the course Jessica worked on completing her first play *Blue Stockings*. The following year *Blue Stockings*, premiered at Shakespeare's Globe earning her a nomination for 'Most Promising Playwright' in the Evening Standard Theatre Awards 2013. She returned to the Globe in 2015 with the world premiere of her play *Nell Gwynn*. We were thrilled when the play transferred to the West End and won the 'Best New Comedy Award' at the Olivier Awards 2016. Jessica is currently writing the film adaptation of *Nell Gwynn*. She was recently awarded a JJ Screenwriting Bursary Award from BAFTA to write *Summerland*, her first original screenplay.

Jessica tutors regularly on Arvon courses and in August tutored on the Starting to Write a Play course, alongside acclaimed playwright and poet Inua Ellams, a Nigerian British writer who also received a grant to attend a playwriting course back in 2010.

Supporting the professional development of a diverse range of writers

Attending an Arvon week can have a transformative effect on an aspiring writer. The supportive environment of the course boosts participants' confidence in themselves and their writing ability. Arvon courses also provide grant recipients with the opportunity to develop networks with other aspiring writers and to form invaluable industry contacts. Tutors and guests readers in 2016 include: Claire Zolkwer, Commissioning Editor, Comedy Entertainment, ITV; Susan Roberts, Radio Editor, BBC Drama North; and Max Porter, editor of Granta Books. Feedback from grant recipients consistently shows how much they value

the career advice and guidance they receive from Arvon tutors working in the publishing or arts industry.

Arvon offers the following to support new writers and grant recipients further:

- Arvon Writers our new Tumblr site, which is a free online writing resource providing tips and exercises from Arvon tutors.
- Jerwood/Arvon Mentoring Scheme a year-long programme providing 9-12 emerging writers with the opportunity to be mentored by a leading writer such as Tanika Gupta, Caroline Bird and Ross Raisin.
- Free professional manuscript assessment from The Literary Consultancy (TLC) as part of their Free Read Scheme. 15 of the most promising grant recipients are selected each year.

Arvon's Strategic Approach to Reaching a Diverse Audience

The Grants Scheme is vital to our efforts to deepen and extend our engagement with BAME writers. In 2015, one in ten writers attending our open courses identified as BAME with the number of BAME writers awarded a grant slightly higher at 13%. Last year, we commissioned Words of Colour to conduct a survey to identify how Arvon is viewed among BAME writers.

The report provided a series of recommendations on how Arvon can overcome some of the misperceptions or perceived barriers writers of various ethnic backgrounds believe restrict or hamper their ability to attend Arvon courses. In February, we promoted the Grants Scheme at the Bare Lit Festival, the UK's first ever literature festival for writers of colour. We have developed reciprocal marketing opportunities with organisations working with BAME writers such as Tamasha, a leading British Asian theatre company and Media Diversified, who seek to cultivate and promote skilled writers of colour. Research by Media Diversified showed that BAME people are under-represented in the media industry by a magnitude of over 300%. We believe that by providing access to creative writing training to writers on low-income Arvon can play a role in helping to address the under-representation of minority writers.

We are indebted to the Trustees of The Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust for their ongoing support which continues to make a vital contribution to the Grants Scheme, providing many writers from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to develop their writing and potential.