

Grant Fund Report, August-December 2019 The Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust



*"Often, it is actually those in the most challenging financial straits who most desperately need the opportunity Arvon provides to writers: time to write, in an environment designed to inspire, nurture and develop creativity. It's carers, those on low incomes, those from BAME backgrounds, who most struggle to justify the space and time to write. **By funding this grant programme, you are bringing writers and new literature into the world, that might not otherwise have the chance to ever be written.**" – Grant recipient*

Arvon is extremely grateful to the Trustees of The Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust for their ongoing support of the Grant Fund. Over the last nine years, your vital support has helped writers on a low income from across the UK to find their voice, develop their craft, or to create time and space to focus on their work in progress. Your generosity continues to make an invaluable contribution to our Grant Fund and helps ensure that the most diverse range of voices possible can attend our courses.

In 2019, we awarded over 130 grants to writers on a low income, enabling them to attend Arvon's courses. Below are three writers on a low income who benefited from your generous support.

A woman from Essex was awarded a grant to participate in a poetry course at Lumb Bank from the 12-17 August 2019. The course tutors were Iranian-born British poet Mimi Khalvati and award-winning poet Mona Arshi. She is a single mum working part-time and has been experiencing financial hardship due to health issues and legal fees. She was evicted from her property in January and now lives in shared accommodation. She commented: *"Before the course I felt like a bit of a fraud and wasn't sure if my writing was worthy of sharing with other people. The course changed all that, from the feedback I received during the week, along with the new skills I learnt in editing my own work and critiquing it... Without the grant none of this would have been possible. I see the grant I received as an opportunity of a lifetime and am thankful to Arvon for giving me this. My mental health was very poor around the time I went to Lumb Bank, as I have been suffering from an eating disorder, depression and anxiety. During my time at Lumb Bank all this seemed to melt away and it has turned out to be a turning point in my recovery, for which I will be forever grateful. **I can say that Arvon was the best medicine for me!**"*

A retired teacher from Surrey was awarded a grant to participate in 'Starting to Write' course at The Hurst from the 19-24 August 2019. The tutors were novelists Jo Furniss and Graham Mort. She received glowing praise from both her tutors about her work-in-progress: *"I am more committed to finishing the book... **I have had this story brewing within me for over fifty years and I am grateful to Arvon for the grant that enabled me to start my writing journey.** I have a new reason to keep going, and writing fills the long lonely hours. Thank you Arvon". When we asked what advice she'd give to people considering supporting the Grant Fund she said: *"Please do it! It is a lifeline to so many, young and old, who have important stories to tell but do not have the means or the knowledge of how to get started. Writing is changing my life. I am finally able to tell about some of the hidden aspects of war and to get closure. I am grateful to Arvon for the grant that is helping me to write what I could not bring myself to tell my sons. I am certain that my story will help others to come to terms with theirs. We all share this common humanity."**

A woman from Nottinghamshire, was awarded a grant to attend 'Starting to Write' at The Hurst from the 21-26 October 2019. The course tutors were award-winning novelist Kerry Young, and Kinshasa-born, London-raised writer and poet JJ Bola. The grant recipient is a single mum, following a divorce from an abusive ex-husband, and is from a working class background. In her application she explained *"I do not get the opportunity to write at home [because of caring responsibilities]. Without the generous grant I would have been unable to attend. It was extremely high quality, and the combination of the two tutors Kerry Young and JJ Bola was magical... They both had an unexpected spirituality which brought the process of writing alive. Meeting Kerry Young was inspirational. It was great that both tutors had interesting backgrounds (refugee from The DR of Congo and Kerry from Jamaica originally with a background in Youth Work.) Last time I looked at a writing course both tutors were from Oxbridge, which made me feel even more that writing was a closed shop to me...The grants make such a difference to someone like me, both writerly, personally and spiritually. **Arvon is life-changing.**"*

Achievements of Grant Fund Alumni



We are excited about a poetry course next June at Totleigh Barton where the tutors **Andrew McMillan** and **Hannah Lowe** and the midweek guest **Toby Champion** are all Grant Fund alumni. A record 10 grant recipients will return to Arvon as tutors and guests in 2020, including **Romalyn Ante**, **Wyl Menmuir**, **Tiffany Murray**, **Richard Scott**, **Louise Wallwein MBE** and **Warda Yassin**. Many of these writers have directly benefited from your generous support. Below is a selection of recent achievements by Grant Fund alumni:

- **Sonia Hope's** short story *'The Cat by The Incredible Jimmy Smith'* has been shortlisted for the Guardian's 4th Estate short story prize for fiction by new BAME writers.
- **Inua Ellams'** retelling of *Three Sisters* premiered at the National Theatre in December 2019. Inua's next project is an afro-futurist reimagining *The Little Prince* produced by Fuel Theatre and English Touring Theatre in autumn 2020.
- **Fiona Benson's** second volume of poems, *Vertigo & Ghost*, won the Forward Prize for Best Collection 2019. Fiona follows in the footsteps of **Phoebe Power**, who won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection last year.
- **Ciara Smyth's** debut novel *The Falling in Love Montage* will be published by HarperTeen in Spring 2020.
- **Romalyn Ante's** debut collection, *Antiemetic for Homesickness* will be published by Chatto & Windus in early 2020.
- **Rosie Garland's** third poetry collection *What Girls Do in the Dark* will be published in autumn 2020.
- **Hanna Silva** has been shortlisted for the BBC Audio Drama Awards 2020 for Best Original Series for her BBC Radio Three drama *Love Thy Synth*. **Janice Okoh** has been shortlisted for the Best Original Single Drama for her BBC Radio Four drama *Red Earth*.
- **Janice Okoh's** play *The Gift*, will be performed at Theatre Royal Stratford East from January 2020.
- **Andrew McMillan's** second poetry collection *Playtime* won the 2019 Polari Prizes, celebrating work that explores the LGBT experience.
- Poet **Patience Agbabi** has branched out into children's fiction with a time-travelling middle grade series. *The Infinite: Leap Cycle*, the first book in the series, will be published in April 2020.
- **Louise Wallwein's** drama *Glue* was broadcast on BBC Radio Four in August 2019.
- **Debris Stevenson's** acclaimed play *Poet in da Corner* will return to the Royal Court Theatre in February 2020 before a national tour.

Thank you for your ongoing support which continues to make a substantial contribution to the Grant Fund.