

# Report to The Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust

## Arvon Grant Fund Report, August 2019

Registered charity number: 306694



*"It was a very special experience for me [...] I feel I have tapped depths within myself which I could rarely do before. The grant was essential for me, I feel so blessed to have received one." – Grant recipient, 2019*

Arvon continues to be deeply grateful to The Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust for their generous commitment to supporting writers on a low income through our Grant Fund. The Foundation's contributions have been a cornerstone of the Grant Fund for nearly a decade and have opened up the Arvon experience for hundreds of people who would not otherwise have been able to experience it.

### Impact on Grant Beneficiaries

By the end of 2019, we will have delivered over 90 courses across our three writing houses in rural Yorkshire, Shropshire and Devon, as well as 40 courses for schools and groups. Thanks to a successful 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary crowdfunding campaign, alongside your support and that of other charitable trusts and foundations, Arvon has been able to award 137 grants in 2019, at an average of £460. Over a quarter of grant recipients were under 25, and 35% were disabled, compared to 10% of course participants as a whole. Nearly half had a household income of less than £11,000 a year. Below is a selection of individuals who benefitted from your generous support this year:

A woman from Devon was awarded a grant to participate in a poetry retreat at Lumb Bank in spring 2019. The grant recipient receives disability benefits due to a severe mental health condition that leaves her unable to work. Following completion of her Creative Writing degree, she had some success with her poetry, with some poems published in magazines and winning competitions, but in recent years felt she had lost her momentum. In her grant application she told us, *"I believe that the Arvon 'house of poetry' retreat will help me to re-establish confidence and sense of authority to my poetic voice."* After the residential, she said, *"The course has been invaluable to me as a writer. I was able to identify my strengths and could begin to see how I might edit my poems to increase their effect. Networking with other writers has been enormously beneficial, and in the course of the week I went from experiencing crippling shyness, to the degree that I was unable to share my work, to reading several pieces in front of my peers. I cannot find words to express how incredible this experience was for me, on a creative and personal level. Thank you so much for the opportunity!"*

A woman from Sussex was awarded a grant to attend a life writing short course at Lumb Bank in spring 2019. The grant recipient works on a part-time basis but has to spend much of her time looking after her two infants, because her husband suffers from progressive mental health issues and she cannot afford childcare. *“Struggling alone to protect my children and raise them with little means has been the biggest challenge I have faced,”* she told us in her application, *“I have resolved to put back into myself; into satisfaction and joy and that which heals me quickest – my writing”*. She felt the course would give her time and space alone to think, as well as the expert critique, advice and guidance from the tutors. Following her course, she was joyous. *“It gave me a HUGE amount of confidence and awarded me with newfound confidence in myself. [...] Thank you so so much for this opportunity which I truly think has been path-altering, life-changing and an awakening”*.

A playwright and actor in her twenties working in Bristol was awarded a grant to attend a playwriting residential at The Hurst in spring 2019. The course tutors were influential and award-winning experimental theatre-maker Tim Crouch and blind writer and performer for the BBC Mandy Redvers-Rowe. Because she works in a precarious industry, is from a working-class family and has high student loan repayments every month, *“the grant was vital”*. She used the residential to work on her play, which draws on her experiences of growing up on a council estate. In her application, she explained how *“living in a busy household, with no dedicated space to write, and constantly having to balance taking paid work with continuing to develop my own creative practice, I’m finding it a challenging and lengthy process to finish writing [my play]”*. Following her course, Bristol theatres and arts organisations are interested in programming her play early next year. She told us, *“[The residential] has massively benefited me as a writer. I have come away with lots more confidence and belief in my work, and feel inspired to keep going... It really has been life-changing for me.”*

### Achievements of Grant Fund Alumni

Arvon’s Grant Fund has provided financial assistance to writers for over twenty years. In the immediate term, an Arvon residential provides writers with time, space and clarity to hone their style and grow in confidence. But the teaching and ethos of Arvon stay with writers for the rest of their lives, and many go on to see mounting success, like poet and dramatist Claudine Toutoungi, who received a grant in 2011:

*“The Arvon grant came through just at the right moment for me. I’d gone from radio producing into a PGCE [teacher training degree], with just enough time to work on a first draft of a play, but no time to reflect on how – if at all – it might develop. I was set to start a teaching job in the autumn, and I needed badly to decompress from a touch too much box-ticking. Arvon’s killer combo of a beautiful landscape, convivial, curious course-goers and brilliant, generous tutors – in my case Douglas Maxwell and Sarah Woods – definitely did the trick. I remember standing on a nearby hill having my own private Julie Andrews Sound of Music moment feeling buzzy and grateful and above all connected to a sense of fantastic creative possibility. It was invaluable in helping me turn that first draft into my full-length play, subsequently performed in New York, at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, and on Radio 4. Several plays and one poetry collection down the line, I’m currently working on a Radio 4 drama based on Nazi Poland and have a second collection of poems due out next year, and I know that to have tapped into the fellowship, freedom to play and space to experiment that Arvon provides is a big part of where I am now.”*