# Alyson

I started community-based adult learning really as a kind of extension of my degree course in drama. I'd been doing a drama course at the University of the West of Scotland and I wanted to develop some more skills actually about how to direct and how to work with actors because the course was quite broad, but I wanted to do things that were a lot more specific. So I attended quite a lot of workshops that weren’t necessarily geared as community-based adult learning where they weren't called that, but that's essentially what they were. But that was my main reason for starting, I wanted to build on the skills that I already had during my degree and to actually just find some more knowledge really that I could use.

I did my learning at the Tron Theatre predominantly, it was a thing that they had years ago, it was called the Tron 100 and it was geared predominantly towards actors and directors and other creative people who would go and attend a series of workshops that give you different skills. But it was associated with the Tron Theatre.

When I went into learning I was excited really, because as I said, I wanted to build on the skills that I had with my learning and I was excited that it wasn't school or university or anything like that as well. I was excited that this was geared specifically towards the needs that I had and the things that I wanted to do as opposed to a general degree where there were bits and pieces of everything. This was much more bespoke, and so mainly I was excited. There was a degree of trepidation as well obviously because it's the same when you're always starting something new, there's always a degree of uncertainty about what's actually going to happen and whether it's going to be a success or so on, so there was a degree of trepidation, but mainly excitement and anticipation.

At the end I felt good actually. I mean the thing is it was still going on, but I felt I had done as much as I could with it actually. It didn't necessarily have a beginning or an end as such. But when I sort of stopped going to it, I feel as if I had learned as much as I could from all the workshops and I felt happy that I'd been able to achieve what I’d set out to do when I decided I wanted to join this particular creative. So I feel as if it had been a very worthwhile experience and I had learned skills that I certainly hadn't during my university course, which was wonderful, but as I've said before, this was much more geared towards specific needs and I'd learned an awful lot more. And I felt it was an extremely useful experience. And I was very glad that I had taken the time to do it.

I did face a couple of barriers, mainly because it wasn't particularly for disabled people and some of the people who were leading the workshops, for instance, they were creatives and they were theatre practitioners. But a lot of them hadn’t necessarily worked with disabled directors or disabled actors before. And I think there were sometimes, not always, but there's sometimes a little bit of a gap between the things that I needed. For instance, if they were working with things on screen you know reading PowerPoints or things, because I couldn't access them in advance and sometimes people didn't know about the kinds of things I needed. Or also if it was quite a visual workshop about movement. And again, I didn't have a support worker or anybody with me to physically describe to me what was going on when people were moving about or how I should be moving. I found sometimes it was a bit difficult to access some of the workshops. But there were other ones that were great. I don't want to say by any manner of means that the workshops were inaccessible. A few of them perhaps were less accessible than they could be from a practical point of view. But something I would say is that as it went on I chose the workshops to attend and the ones not to and latterly I found as I went along there was a pattern of oh right this this particular for instance script writing workshops were very accessible because it was like come and read a bit of a play or something and it would be something I already had. Or certain acting workshops, but I stopped doing movement workshops for instance, after a while, because I knew that they were inaccessible for me in particular.

There wasn't really any specific support, I didn't have support workers or anything like that. They were supportive in as much as when I said to them, these are some needs I have and then they became used to me after a while, so they were supportive from that point of view. But as I've said, I didn't have support workers or anything like that. That's more to do with the wider system, though, I don't think that's to do with that particular group of workshops or that particular theatre company. It's because unless I'm being physically paid to do something, for instance, and get support from Access to Work, and this obviously wasn't a paid opportunity, and while I'm sorry I couldn't get the support, that's not that particular theatre company’s fault. That's the system more generally, I would say.

The learning has really impacted the way I do my own creative practice now. For instance, the workshops that I’ve done, particularly the script writing ones for instance, they’ve given me great skills in dramaturgy and reading skills and working with actors, the kind of things that’s really the kind of nuts and bolts of the work that I do. And I probably wouldn't have been able to do it without doing this because what I had done before you know at university was very theory based. So the fact that this was so practical, and you know the skills in these workshops, it was all so sort of practical for me to…it helped me really learn things and work out how to do things rather than just how to think about things. It got me sort out of my head a little bit, I would say. And, you know, stop me thinking as an academic and more as a theatre practitioner.

I would advise anybody who wants to have a go at community-based adult learning to basically just go for it because there are opportunities for everything and there are so many different courses out there. The stuff I was doing was very specific to me and did what I needed, but there are courses in absolutely everything and it's great to actually just learn, whether it be to add new skills, to add to existing skills that you have, or to learn new skills and to start something completely different. But it's a great opportunity, it's very exciting. So I would strongly advise anyone to just go for it if they possibly can.

And something else I'd like to add actually is from the other point of view because now a lot of what I do funnily enough is actually delivering workshops myself. So, I've kind of moved in some ways from actually taking part in creative community-based adult learning as a participant to actually planning workshops and so on myself and a lot of what I do now is actually delivering workshops and opportunities for other creatives. And again that comes from having done these courses and it's interesting actually working from both sides of it, but actually it's a lot of the same skills because again, I was inspired by some of the workshop facilitators and how they conducted the workshops and that sort of helped me develop my own path from that point of view. So actually, as a facilitator, community-based adult learning is extremely exciting as well and a great opportunity.