

# engage in the visual arts

## **Extend Leadership Programme Case Study: Helen Davies**

### **Reasons for applying**

For Helen, the opportunity to apply to Extend came at a crucial point in her professional development:

*I was at mid-career stage and wanted to acquire the tools and knowledge to enable me to move into senior management. I wanted to try to address issues within my own practice – to make time for research and to address specific issues relating to my current post.*

She also felt that Extend represented an opportunity to reflect on various aspects of her role and to share experiences and practice with others in similar roles in other organisations:

*It was an opportunity to look at areas such as audience development and to share practice with others...to look at a more balanced approach to aspects of my practice.*

### **Experiences of the Extend placement**

Extend participants were encouraged to identify placement opportunities which contributed to their professional and leadership development. Helen chose to interpret the Extend placement opportunity creatively and opted for a research-based enquiry which enabled her to enhance her knowledge of leadership models:

*I wanted to look at horizontal work structures because we were changing structures [in my organisation] from a more traditional to a more horizontal structure with a joint leadership model.*

Helen developed an outline research proposal and identified individuals whom she felt could contribute to her learning:

*Originally I thought that I wanted to spend time in an organisation but actually talking to people was very valuable. In the course of my research I came across Claire Antrobus who has done research into horizontal structures. I spoke to her and to my mentor and found that really valuable.*

The learning which emerged from conversations proved to be enlightening:

*I had free-flowing conversations and learned that unless they're very carefully structured, horizontal leadership models can be unsuccessful. You need a tight framework to allow freedom.*

Because Helen's organisation was itself considering altering its leadership structures, Helen's research yielded tangible results:

*I was stepping into unknown territory. I was interested in learning about structures so that we would have something to refer to in considering change. I was able to feed my learning into [my work at] Arnolfini.*

### **Experiences of mentoring**

Extend participants were encouraged to think about the type of mentor who might best support them in achieving the aspirations set out in their Personal Development Plans. Helen worked with her line manager to identify an appropriate mentor:

*Mentoring was one of the key learning outcomes. Finding Noel happened through chatting to my line manager and he's agreed to carry on working with me outside the Programme. He said that he's found it really valuable.*

Though mentoring relationships were informed by a set of guidelines, we encouraged mentors and mentees to agree a set of expectations between themselves. For Helen, mentoring offered an opportunity to discuss her transition to a new role within her own organisation:

*It was helpful to talk through thoughts, ideas and strategies...it was completely and utterly invaluable. Noel saw me through the transition to a new role...it's so difficult to get that individual support. Extend was definitely a factor which informed the executive decision to invite me to act up because I'd increased in confidence and I got the opportunity to put my learning into practice.*

### **Outcomes from engagement with the programme**

For Helen, participation in the programme coincided with an unexpected opportunity for advancement within her organisation:

*I had a sense of empowerment which enabled me to step into a new role.*

Towards the end of the Programme we invited participants to revisit the skills inventory which they had completed at the outset of the programme as a means of measuring the distance they'd travelled over the course of their involvement:

*I found that at the end I was marking myself as mainly 4s and 5s compared to 2s at the beginning but I don't feel it's the end of the journey - I want more of that. It feels like a catalyst.*

The Programme provided Helen with valuable 'time out' to reflect on leadership in general and her own leadership potential in particular:

*I didn't have set ideas about leadership...it sounds so grand. It gave me an understanding of how to build on leadership qualities and to think about whether it was appropriate for me. I think you get out what you put in. I felt very open about coming on to the Programme – I was very thirsty for knowledge and input to bring into my own practice.*