



Gallery: Nottingham Contemporary

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Reality check

In one of our steering meetings, one of the members voiced that they may not be able to attend any longer. I asked them to elaborate – suggesting the story would be good to tell as it would apply to other young people accessing our programme. I asked for a few sentences, but said that if they felt passionate about their situation it would be a good chance to have their thoughts noticed and possibly start discussion as part of *Circuit*. The following is what I received in my inbox the next day.

Financial issues are a huge part of a young person's life, and this brilliant articulation of a lived experience is a good reason to discuss how to equip young people to be able to more employable, more confident and more successful, earlier in their careers.

We decided not to edit the length or the content, so that the letter stays complete and entirely the voice of the young person.

Hello Alice,

So, I thought I'd take one for the team when I asked in our last meeting, and felt quite cheeky by doing so, if the work we will do for the up-coming Arts Festival will be paid somewhat? Anything?

Since leaving University last June I went straight into an internship, unpaid of course, and found I was unable to change jobs for fear of not being able to be available and flexible for such positions of 'learning through valuable experience'. The cheap and tacky student bar I worked at during my time as a student became my main source of income as a graduate. In this job I deal with drunk loonies, have to shout at cocky individuals who feel they can disrespect myself and the property I work in, get harassed both physically and verbally on a daily basis, do not get paid for all the hours I work due to company policies, deal with other people's bodily fluids, and so on. I keep this job, however, so I can stay flexible and still be present at the steering meetings and man stalls at events on behalf of the gallery etc which I really love to do. I have felt it is worth it for that reason because the opportunities that have come about are phenomenal and I feel I am part of something important. And I can continue my career by being involved with such an exciting group and project that is fuelling my confidence and in the process gaining lots of good skills, keeping me from having a nervous mental breakdown due to lack of direction in my life.

My council tax is always overdue, I owe many family members money, my current pair of glasses are broken and I am needing a new pair, I am coming to the end of my limit of extending my overdraft and therefore have no back up funds now. My

wisdom teeth are coming through and pushing the others out of place I am needing some sort of brace to prevent this from getting worse. I often can eat only once a day, I no longer wear any of my skirts or shorts because I cannot afford to go through any more tights (the environment is benefiting from this), I have started putting water on my cereal because it is much cheaper. My personal hygiene may start to suffer as I decrease the amount of washes I can do in the week with the amount of money on my meter...

The way of thrift is the way of my life.

The list goes on. But it has been worth it.

For the festive period I had a second job to see me through, so working on average about 56 hours per week, but definitely worth it because I was still able to be flexible. Into January that is no longer an option. I have considered going on JSA, this would solve so many problems! Becoming a 'webcam girl' has also come to mind to help me make ends meet and start to address my red zone status. I fear this may jeopardise my desire to work with children in the future, as well as shrinking my dignity.

I am not meaning to moan about my career choice, or what I am needing to do in between to stay an active part of the art scene in the city. I also do not mean to come across as bitter about not being supported by my parents any more, I am an adult now and it does come with perks! I wish only to highlight the chunk of individuals who find they are not in a position to dedicate themselves to the cause due to the sort of pressures that are, maybe, quite new to them and not very prepared for? I do not live with my parents or a guardian and have very few comforts. I am, however, in the age bracket for this youth group. Though my sort of situations may apply to other ages of course, I believe I represent those who can be large assets to the development of the festival purely because of our experience over the years, and the degree level we have worked hard toward and proved our worth with, must account for something?

I am in need of a lifeline in order to survive otherwise I will be in lots of trouble. I'm already on the verge of it, and it causes much stress to think what could happen if I lost the foundations I have in place at the moment. If there could be some roles available that mean we can stay involved, even if they are not very well paid, I would do it.

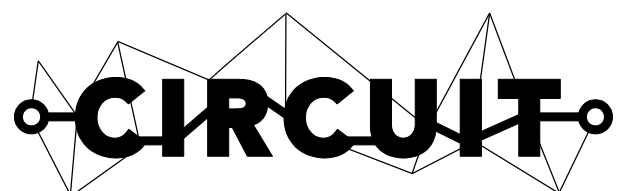
I am desperate to stay involved with the group and will continue to do the tasks that will allow me to become an advocate. Unfortunately, it has come to a point now that I must adhere to the duty of care I have to myself and commit to a full time job with regular, reliable hours. These hours inevitably clash with the times the groups meet for both the steering meetings and the workshops. Apart from students, most people my age would not be able to come to these, and I know of so many who would if they could, resulting in missing out on the opportunities and activities that are meant to open to the whole age bracket.

I am in the process of requesting regular time off from my new job, swapping around of shifts here and there, to ensure I can still attend the meetings but I fear by doing this makes me an annoying employee and I've only just started. Hopefully the outcome is prosperous and they are understanding.

Thank you for the chance to have my voice heard on the issues, it is a matter that I realise is not overlooked or ignored, which is very heart-warming and inspires

confidence in those who are higher up, that the aims of CIRCUIT are being taken into account and applied.

Thank you!



phf Paul Hamlyn
Foundation

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