

Transcription of New Ways Forward conversation with Emily

Andy : Emily, we're going to talk a little bit about being a member of Artists First and what that has meant to you over the years. Can you remember when you first joined Artists First?

Emily: I remember I was in another group that was based in Knowle and I think Becky* was the one that ran it. I used to do 9 o'clock -11 o'clock . It was easier back then because I was in Totterdown so it wasn't quite as far to travel. But then when I moved to Patchway it was more difficult to get there, so Becky said she'd see if there were any other groups 'closer to home' . Then she managed to get hold of Jane at the time. Jane told her about Artists First and asked whether I'd like to go and meet everybody, introduce myself. I remember speaking to Jane on the telephone and I said that I'd like to give it a try with the new group because it would be closer to home. Then I left the group I was at in Knowle as it was more difficult. Then I came to see Jane at the studio. You were both there at the time I think.

Andy: So that was when we had the studio in Southmead, Bristol Plays Music. You came along for a coffee and a chat ...

Emily: That's right. You and Jane were there. Jane asked me if I'd like to join and I said ' Yes - I'd love to' . She explained how it all worked.

Andy: So from then on, you were a regular member of the group?

Emily: Yeah - I loved it.

Andy: During your time with the group what was it like working with all the other artists?

Emily: I thought it was good. I liked them all equally. It was nice chatting to them.

Andy: Things like getting to use acrylics and inks and pastels : had you done that before or was that new for you?

Emily: That was a bit new - the acrylics and that sort of stuff. It was nice being able to use paint again.

Andy: And so do you think being part of the group has helped you to develop as an artist?

Emily: Yes, definitely. It's been great.

Andy: And you've shown your work through Artists First.

Emily: Yes, at the RWA ! What's the other one!?

Andy: Well you were part of the North Bristol Arts Trail weren't you.

Emily: Yes. Marilyn (an Artists First Trustee) took one.

Andy: Yes - so you've sold artwork too.

Emily: That feels nice to be able to sell to people.

Andy: It's an important part of being an artist isn't it : being able to show and sell work.

Emily: Sometimes it's hard but it's nice if you can.

Andy: Your time at Artists First has been slightly different compared to some of the other artists maybe, because we've concentrated a lot on our archive and artwork from past artists. You've mentioned Jane a couple of times. For people who didn't know Jane, she was one of a kind. She was also the groups coordinator right from the very start. Sadly she passed away. That meant that we had time to reflect on everything that we've done.

Emily: We went to her funeral didn't we.

Andy: We did, yes. And now we're in a completely different phase . We're working towards closing the group.

Emily: Yes, because of money and also, Andy, you're retiring!

Andy: We're not just leaving you high and dry though are we.

Emily: We're going to try and work as individual artists.

Andy: We've been speaking a lot about new ways forward for everybody. You've recently been working with me and with Amelie (our Artist Development Associate) and you've put in an application to the Arts Council.

Emily: Yes - we keep our fingers crossed !

Andy: And that would be for individual money for you to continue as an artist. So coming to a studio on your own, with support. You've spoken a lot to me about needing to be understood. Do you want to talk a little bit more about that ?

Emily: Artists First were patient with my learning difficulties. When you've got a learning disability, people can get judgemental. That can be a bit upsetting sometimes if people don't understand where you're coming from. It can be a bit hurtful.

Andy: I've certainly seen you change and grow over the past few years. You've delivered some great talks at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery as part of Alternative Visions which was great. You were also part of every workshop we did for our Heritage Lottery Artist Workshops.

Emily: That was great!

Andy: So all those things have helped you?

Emily: Yes.

Andy: And your work is unique. That's the other thing - Artists First isn't therapy and isn't a college course. You can do the work that you want to do.

Emily: Yes - it's your own interpretation. That's what's important.

Andy: With new ways forward, you're going to carry on with some of your connections. You mentioned the RWA earlier - The Royal West Of England Academy - we'll continue going there.

Emily: And Arnolfini - that's a nice place.

Andy: Do you think it's going to be a bright future Emily?

Emily: Yes.

Andy: Well it's certainly been a privilege working with you and that's going to continue if we get the funding. I'm not going yet ! Thank you very much Emily.

*Becky - an Art Therapist who worked with Emily.