

Hi, I'm Dora. I'm a core team member, and I'm part of the Third Space team. I am a clinical psychologist. When I'm not working as part of The Hub, I work as a psychologist in a community team for adults with learning disabilities in Westminster. I've been particularly involved in Third Space, a project that tries to radically think about a different way of people with learning disabilities and health and social care professionals being together.

I would say that the way that Heart n Soul at The Hub has worked has been life-changing for me. It's been such a different way of working than I'm used to in my day-to-day NHS work. I've been working at NHS for 17 years, and I love it, but it's really hard work. And a lot of the time, I feel very tired and drained by it. Spending time doing the work at The Hub has felt so important, and I've just felt better in myself. I've come away feeling energized, excited, and hopeful about what's possible to achieve.

It's been really something that's been so important to me to see that there are different ways of working. What's been really exciting has been able to take some of that energy back into health and social care services. I've got lots of strong memories from the last three years, really, I think, of working on this project, and there's a few that really stick in my mind. One of them was right at the beginning when I asked Mark what I should be doing? And he said, "Just come along and have fun, and we'll work it out," and that blew my mind. No one had ever said that to me before. And I thought, just, I had a job to do. I had an outcome that I needed to achieve. It was a bit scary but really refreshing to be given that message.

I think that kind of way of approaching things where we know we want to make things fun, we know we want to make things better for people with learning disabilities and autism, but the rest is up for making it up as we go along meant a huge amount in the beginning, and I've seen it happen throughout the project. It's given so much energy and imagination to the work. But another memory that really stands out has been really missing being at The Hub and being at Wellcome because that environment felt very special to be in. There was something that it did for all of us just being in there. We felt welcomed, and we felt important, like what we were doing was important. And after the lockdown, the first lockdown, I was worried about how it would feel, whether the work would still feel as important.

We had a Third Space session where we did some drawing together, and it just felt exactly the same. The culture, the way of being with one another just transferred online. I got all the energy and the hopes that I had when I was in the room with everybody, and that was really powerful and really exciting to feel it, helping me to see that what we were doing was not just about being in that building. It was something bigger than that. It's a way of being that everybody embodies. And the artists at Heart n Soul are just so confident and so skilled that it really can't help but translate into other spaces. In summary, it's a bit about just the culture of the way that people work and the real belief that everybody has in one another.

I think what's been really interesting about the project has been how we've evolved and changed over time. And that's been really important is that nothing's been fixed, so there's been lots of learning lessons along the way. An example of that would be in the meetings that I think

we learned early on that we were talking for too long, for some people, and we needed to have more breaks. So, quite quickly, there was a change in the way that meetings were structured so that we would never talk or sit down for longer than 45 minutes or an hour. That was very important for lots of reasons, but it gave a really strong message that it was about trying to get the best out of everybody. Changing the structure was open to anybody, so anyone of us could say we needed it to be a little bit different. I think that was very important.

I've learned a lot from Heart n Soul. I've learned a lot about just slowing down and being prepared to really listen to one another in a way that we try to do in my NHS work, but it feels much easier to do it in the Heart n Soul, because there's just a different sense of pressure. I think, in general, my confidence has grown as a psychologist. I've taken that into my work into the NHS, which is having a slightly different attitude to things, which I hope has led to me doing some better work.

I'd like to think that I've always been more interested in the skills and talents, and strengths of everybody, including people with learning disabilities and autism. But when you work in the NHS, it's often the opposite. The focus is on problems and disabilities and supposed dysfunction. So, it's really hard not to get drawn into thinking about problems and challenges. So, being part of The Hub just turns all of that totally on its head all the time, every day. It's just such a clear message that's where we should put our energy. That's where the good stuff happens. That's where there's so much possibility.