



**Creative Places,
Edenderry**



Looking after the Artist/Facilitator

Four Artists/Facilitators in Conversation with Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator, Seonaid Murray



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council



A Unique Snapshot from Four Different Practices/Perspectives

Grab a comfy chair and a cup of tea and have a read!

Welcome to our 4th Community Toolkit. Our Creative Places, Edenderry Coordinator, Seonaid Murray sat down to talk to four experienced Artists & Facilitators about their practice. The following includes their thoughts, advice for best preparing for, delivering and post facilitation of an Arts based workshop; how to 'ground' yourself in order to move on to the next workshop/event or to head home to decompress!

Conversation Four

Laura Phillips, Mindful Doodle Artist, based in Edenderry talks to Seonaid on Zoom

Seonaid: Good morning Laura!

Laura: Hi!

Seonaid: Would you like to tell us a little bit about your practice?

Laura: I'm known as the Barley Moon - it's my brand name for all the things I do - which are all mindful based practices - the main thing I have been doing with Creative Places, Edenderry is Mindful Doodling. I have run a few workshops in Edenderry, based around Mindful Doodling techniques - that's who I am!

Seonaid: Brilliant, thanks and it's been great working with you, I think it is coming up on 2 years now since we first met at Edenderry library?

Laura: October 2022 is when I first got involved

Seonaid: We have worked together in different ways, sometimes remotely, me here in Donaghadee and you in Edenderry and sometimes in the same room. It's always great to witness your approach, you have a lovely natural way of working with the groups. Would you have anything in particular that you would do to look after yourself before you go out to facilitate a workshop?

Laura: Yeah, my whole practice started because it was a well being practice I used for myself and then I wanted to share it with people. So before I am doing a workshop I will always make sure I have done something to calm any nerves and settle myself/ground myself. Doodling is a big part of that but also just breathing techniques or maybe just a little meditation or something like that. So I am not flying into a situation feeling stressed or anything .

Seonaid: Yeah - I think I was explaining to you - I have been speaking to a couple of Artists/Facilitators this week and we have all described in different ways about how we talk to ourselves! - Yesterday, Susan said that she has a mantra that she might say to herself - Stephen, who is a Drama facilitator said he sits in the car and just talks to himself before every session *both laugh* so it's interesting - you are preparing yourself for going into the room aren't you? You don't always know who is going to be in the room -

especially when you work with different organisations and in different capacities. Keeping that in mind, how do you look after yourself during a session. Do you have a plan in your head?

Laura: Yeah, I'm always aware if I'm in a situation that maybe some people who haven't tried Mindful Doodling before will be there and might be a little bit dubious about it. They might be giving the impression that they are not very impressed with trying it out - they are maybe making some assumptions about the set up and they maybe don't think they are going to enjoy it! I try to not take it too personally and explain gently that they might enjoy it. I always find that when they try it they realise how nice it is - often it's just people thinking that they are not artistic - so they are worried about it. Obviously, I always explain that anyone can doodle and anyone can draw! And then they relax a bit.

Seonaid: We always do take it personally - even if we try not to - because we care about what we are doing.....

you can feel really uplifted if it goes well and also quite low if it doesn't go as planned. You play it all out in your head and sometimes make a small issue a lot worse than it actually is! I always think that you do a great job of explaining your workshops and making the offer to people to take part if they would like to. I have never felt under pressure in your workshops because you are given a really positive invitation. After a workshop do you have a specific way that you would look after yourself?

Laura: Ehm - yeah - I've had workshops before where I have worried a little bit about maybe how people have found it -and thought they didn't enjoy it as much as I thought they would. I try not to create a story in my head, I just try to practice mindfulness and techniques that I like to do when I get home. To decompress from the workshop and stop myself over analysing but it is just human nature to try and pick on the negative things that have happened!

Seonaid: I had a lecturer at Uni who was really good at explaining that you are never going to win over the whole room. And that really helped me because then I could see that someone might just be having a really bad day - or perhaps something external going on - which you are not going to be able to fix - so don't try to!

Laura: If they are just not in the mood - or don't want to try it or have really just decided it is not something that they are going to like then that's ok!

Seonaid: I think facilitating is quite brave and you have to have quite thick skin because of that aspect. Presenting something to someone which they might reject! You said that you would have some mindful techniques that you might use after a workshop? Is there anything that you could share which might be helpful for other people?

Laura: I just do something similar to what I do before hand. If I have felt the workshop wasn't as good as I had hoped, maybe do some nice breathing techniques and focus on the things

that have gone well rather than the things that I felt maybe didn't go so well and then doing some drawing myself or like journaling about something. I haven't really had a situation where I've felt really upset but that is how I would approach it.

Seonaid: I know certainly when I first started out, I was always rushing to the next thing (it's a luxury to have some time between workshops!) but if possible I will try to sit for a moment or just have a cup of tea! If you were able to speak to your younger self would there be any pitfalls that you would look out for? Or something that you would be mindful of going into a workshop?

Laura: The one thing I have learnt in the time I have facilitated Creative Places, Edenderry workshops was one occasion where there was a miscommunication with a Venue about a set of workshops.

that I was going to be facilitating. I was waiting on approval but they had assumed that I was doing them and when that happened I sort of felt like I had handled it all wrong. I had got myself all worked up about the fact that it had happened - so I would probably give advice to my younger self just to not get so upset - just take a few breaths and really calmly explain - but it was all fine in the end - I think I just immediately panicked!

Seonaid: If I am right - I might have been involved in that one?

Laura: Yes - you helped!

Seonaid: It's a really good point actually - as freelancers - we might be working completely independently but it is a different thing when you are working with an organisation. And I have certainly had good and bad experiences of that. Often, it is no ones fault. When you bring in organisations it is kind of inevitable isn't it? Also, once you bring in multiple personalities - too many chefs or something?!

Laura: Yeah, that can be the case! I think that's what happened that time and it was just a miscommunication.

Seonaid: I thought you handled it really well. What other lessons have you learnt along the way?

Laura: There was one workshop and I wasn't quite with it and was in my own head a bit. I had various appointments that morning and I ended up rushing. I ended up carrying in lots of boxes which I probably shouldn't have done and I was a bit stressed and I remember feeling that it took me a while to get into the workshop. I was a bit stressed and I think people picked up that I was stressed - but I didn't really want to say why I was stressed. So, I think what I've learnt from that is to try to make sure that I don't have loads of things booked up prior to the workshop - give myself the time - I hadn't left enough time between where I had come from to go to the workshop - and my head wasn't in the right space and I didn't have time to do my usual grounding rituals.

The workshop went fine it's just that I felt - like I was a bit kind of stressed during it!

Seonaid: It's important, because with the best will in the world - I could be trying to give myself time and sometimes I'm not facilitating music as you know, I'm maybe coming in to facilitate a meeting but it's the same type of technique - you might not be ready and all of a sudden all of these people start coming in and they want a cup of tea and are asking lots of questions and you know, in a perfect world, I would have the key to the door and they wouldn't come in until I'm ready but then if you are facilitating in somewhere like the Parish Centre and people start wandering in, unfortunately I have had to be the person to say sometimes - 'would you just mind waiting in the hallway for a minute?' but it can be really difficult - and then also the other thing is honesty - it's ok to just explain that the workshop will be running a little bit late and give yourself more time. Life happens! The lesson is to give more time?

Laura: Yeah - give more time

Seonaid: With any of our workshops we build in time for tea because it gives people a chance to talk at the start but it is also keeping the Artist in mind. If you know that you are coming and that there's tea built in then hopefully that makes you feel that you don't have to start at a set time. Tea is normally my best friend because you can use it for loads of things, 'Oh, hang on a second I just need to go boil another kettle', that could be me trying to remove myself from a tense situation or, 'would you mind going and getting the tea', and that is maybe someone who is a bit difficult or disruptive. Anyway, we could talk all day about techniques! Would there be any good advice that you have been given along the way that you think you might like to share?

Laura: Ehmm - probably just to not have too many expectations of workshops, go and enjoy it and let it organically develop. I think sometimes you get a set idea of how something is going to go but actually you can

end up putting too much pressure on yourself. The first group of workshops I facilitated, I got myself a bit anxious about how it was all going to work out because I hadn't done anything like that before. I remember my friend Jenny, who facilitates workshops with you as well, just saying to me, 'Just relax, just go in and just enjoy it', rather than focussing on each tiny part of it and plan it minute by minute. Just go in and have a cup of tea and go with the flow, settle in and get to know everyone. Just start it and it usually goes really nicely, don't over think it!

Seonaid: That's really good advice and advice that we probably all need to think about from time to time. It can be very difficult in the moment and I suppose I would just go back to when you care about something then it tends to effect you. It is hard to mange that, you are soaking up the energy of the room so you have to then protect yourself! Like you say ground yourself afterwards, is there anything else that you would like to say - or anything else that comes to mind?

Laura: Yes, sometimes things happen that are out of your control so you just have to learn to try and recentre yourself and don't over analyse. For example, you know that I am a little bit stressed about the Doodle Mural project because it has ended up taking longer than expected because the venue where it was going to be displayed has had to change. It is a bit stressful but what I've learnt is that we will find a solution and it will happen and not to over think what's going on - it will be resolved and it will be fine! So to anyone who is coming in as a new facilitator to Creative Places, Edenderry, I would say just try to remember that things will happen but not to worry and you will find a solution and don't over think it!

Seonaid: The Doodle Mural piece has been completed beautifully and it would be a mistake to rush to find a place for it because it should be displayed proudly! For example the 'Wings of Edenderry' project was supposed to be displayed outside but it ended up inside, quite often projects adapt

and change. Or Art, on more of a global scale, like Banksy! *both laugh!* I think that's really good advice - sometimes things are out of your control - that's brilliant - thank you!

Laura: Thank you!