

Sandra on Working for ELTA

Sandra was interviewed over zoom while in her study. There little Buddha could be seen and loads of plants, including an aloe plant.

"This is my little reading nook with all my books and journal. My own little space, where I can read, meditate and paint. I am working on writing projects and maybe I'll come up with an e-book. I'm putting it all together now."

Sandra has an Instagram account with sayings and quotes about the good things of life – "You have to find the blessing in everything otherwise you will be miserable. I want to write something people can meditate and focus on. I meditate daily and keep a journal as I reflect on life and think or visualise about the changes and growth for my life. I also listen to mindfulness and self-growth podcasts, etc."

"My aim is to give up my current work and focus on my own work , where I can make a huge difference in the lives of others. I want to leave this world better than I found it and I hope my writing will help forge a way to make this a reality- I have always been a free spirit and open minded individual who thinks above all, we are to be the love and light in this world."

"I am still in touch with Kang Sing from the project, quite regularly - she remembers my birthday every year as I do hers. Jackie , Tracy and I, who became friends from the book making, Textile and card making projects are still very close friends of mine."

"I was encouraged by Sonia to attend the card making group at her church and then to ELTA where I became part of ELTA book making and then the sewing.

I joined in making the Map of Newham, The Noah's Ark and various other ELTA projects."

Sandra shows one of the hand bound books she made. The book making group met at Jackie's house.

Sophie began to come to the card making sessions where we met. I then joined her as a project worker, helping teach adults with learning disabilities at The McGrath Centre, then at the Trinity Centre, and we extended the art sessions to Beckton Centre where there was a cafe also run by the adults with learning disabilities. However, the carers took advantage, going off shopping and playing on their phones.

I had no previous experience of working with adults with LD. At first I did not feel confident about having anything to give them but they gave me confidence, teaching me how to communicate, sometimes with words and sometimes without. They taught me a lot.

I worked with Sophie, to do the planning and facilitating sessions.

Some of my favourites from the class were Donald, Sonya, and Reena, who passed away. Arthur too was lovely; he loved Dr Who, - they were a lovely bunch. Halima went on lovely holidays to America and Sonya to the Caribbean and Canada. She was a cheeky monkey.

Fenella- one moment she was engaging, and another day she would do just what she wanted. Aslam was quite funny - he was always saying he was going to Pakistan to get married. I learnt how to listen from them – I let them tell me what they needed - not just with words, but in other ways. I learnt compassion from them. We would tweek the lessons for the different people's abilities so each person's needs was catered for.

At the Trinity Centre some people were better at sponging, some at painting, some at textiles; some had mobility problems or couldn't grip well and we had to contend with this.

This class got very big taking £80 - £100 a lesson. We learnt how to record the money coming in - book keeping really. With that money we could buy supplies and then make enough money to keep the class going.

ELTA gave me the experience of working with people, learning to incorporate other people's way of working into the teaching. I learnt to delegate. I had to learn on the job with ELTA. It was helpful to have the online learning sessions, and guest facilitators/ tutors coming in to teach us like Ben and Rachael. I miss the garden at the vicarage where Iona made a rainbow cake for a celebration one afternoon.

I wrote blog entries and a booklet "Textile Tales" for ELTA.

I quite enjoy writing, as it is how I express myself best – on Instagram I use my own art as background to my writings - and ELTA brought out that side of me. It also enabled me to be more confident about painting and photography.

I was always good at writing. I learnt to read at 4 and used to be entered into school writing competitions and won a £100 when I was about 10 in a school writing competition titled,

'How I can help in my Community.' I used to create my own stories and turn them into little books as a child. Writing is my greatest passion- it is something I come back to all the time. Writing for ELTA helped me write in a different descriptive and informative style. It was a form of storytelling - trying to present what ELTA does to the world - I quite enjoyed trying to find the right words and to keep it interesting.

My favourite projects were the "Noah's Ark" and "The Newham Map". The Noah's Ark was our first commission. I can't remember which animals I embroidered - I did birds too - quite a few. I liked the subject matter of Noah's Ark and the colour and how it came about in colour and stitching and seeing people enjoy it at our exhibition at St Martin-in-the-Fields.

Teaching at the V&A was beautiful, and exciting to be there - with other groups doing different things around us, like printing. I was pleased with the turnout there - about 150 people came to our classes that evening.

I think I was with ELTA for about six years - 2010 - 2016