

My Experience of Working with Mansions of the Future

By Selina Tarnowska

I started my adventure with Mansions of the Future (MotF) three months ago. At that time, I was still new to the city, but found myself ready to start something new and gain experience in the Arts sector. As it turns out MotF has proven to be the perfect place for me.

The biggest project that I have worked on was ON/OFF's 'Public House' commission – a part of *Urban Form: Social Architecture & The Commons* season. It was an amazing experience and the first time that I helped create and develop a project from start to finish. During the delivery of this ambitious commission we faced many challenges, but the outcome was outstanding. Working on this project has allowed me to explore new experiences and places that I never thought I would enjoy. I learnt a lot about how to organise and manage a project of this kind and a large-scale public event - carrying out tasks relating to negotiation, public safety, first aid, and time keeping. I worked with ON/OFF Collective and technicians in the University of Lincoln's Engineering Department, helping to build and weld a chimenea; the central element in ON/OFF parade, the conclusion of their long-term project. I helped create a series of shields / a roaming shelter - working with volunteers and the general public during open workshops in the lead up to the parade. My management skills were put to the test during both the workshops and the parade itself. During both I had the chance to work with all age groups; this opportunity made me a lot more aware of the different issues faced by individuals and communities and how to be supportive in my role. I met many lovely people at the University and on the Ermine Estate in the process.

This design developed by ON/OFF, in collaboration with the Ermine Community is very special to me. I am an Architecture student and my master's thesis is about social architecture, creating space for local communities whilst preserving / acknowledging the past. 'Public House' has had a direct impact on my ongoing studies. ON/OFF's fresh view on designing has made me rethink some of my choices and I am grateful to have four ON/OFF members supporting me in my studies, acting as online tutors. Nick, Michael, Alison and Dan – thank you!

The skills that I have gained during this project will be useful throughout my future career. I have learnt so much, like how to organise a parade (one with a moving fire element) and how to operate a drill (a small victory, but no less significant). Over the course of the past three months I have developed a lot as a person, and I hope that I will have the chance to apply the knowledge and new skills I have developed during future projects and ventures.

Other events and activities I supported on include a number of Communal Lunches, which take place at MotF every month. I think the most rewarding experience was supporting on this events series and walking around the neighbourhood offering hot lunches to member of the public experiencing homelessness or social isolation. It's made me more aware of the problems surrounding us and made me even more willing and better equipped to help.

It's such a shame that my placement is coming to an end soon. Thank you to the Mansions team - Beth, Carys, Colette, Kerry, Bhav and Tim. Thank you for all the support, faith, positivity and humour. Working with all of you was a pleasure and I enjoyed every minute of it. I feel lucky and proud to be able to call myself a part of the Mansions gang!