

Supporting Enterprise Industry Mentors & Student Placements

Barefoot Books

Overview

Barefoot Books, a leading Bath-based publisher, have provided invaluable support in the form of a combined work placement and mentoring opportunity for a Masters in Creative Writing student at Bath Spa University to learn the basics of the publishing industry.

About the Project

Barefoot Books is an independent publisher, with offices in Cambridge, USA and Bath, England. It specialises in carefully crafted children's books, CDs, games, puppets, puzzles, and gifts that celebrate enduring values and inspire creativity. Barefoot Books are sold online, at flagship stores in Cambridge, Massachusetts and in FAO Schwarz, Manhattan, and through a global network of partners from Shanghai to San Francisco. Barefoot Books also provides ways for adults who love its books to become Barefoot Books Ambassadors, who can earn money, fundraise, and make a difference in children's lives by marketing and selling Barefoot in their communities.

Karyn Sailstad, studying an MA in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University, applied to the University's Industry Mentors Programme because she was eager to access advice and guidance from someone working in the publishing industry, gain practical experience and make contacts that she could follow up after her degree when she would be looking for employment in the Bath area. Karyn aspires to work in publishing and be involved with literary festivals and children's literacy.

As Barefoot Books is a local company to the University with an inspirational ethos, it was approached and invited to join the Industry Mentors Programme. Tessa Strickland, Co-Founder and Editor-in-Chief with 15 years' experience of mentoring, was open-minded about participating in the programme and formulated an exciting package of mentoring and work experience.

Benefits

Bath Spa University's graduate placement and industry mentors schemes have given Karyn hands-on experience over a substantial period of time, which she will be able to add to her CV and use in her approach to finding employment in such a competitive industry. Karyn's employability prospects have improved through gaining a sound foundation in editorial and related production processes, exposure to commercial issues and to systems and procedures.

Barefoot Books offers a regular three-month programme to graduates who want all-round experience to help them obtain entry level positions in a highly competitive field – having a recommendation from the local university was very useful. Tangible business benefits reported by Barefoot Books include savings made and improved UK/US communications due to Karyn being a US citizen currently in the UK.

Fast Facts

- Leading Bath-based publisher participates in the University's Industry Mentors Programme
- A combination of mentoring and work experience has provided an invaluable opportunity for a student to understand the basics of the publishing industry
- Karyn has gained a range of skills and knowledge to add to her CV

Outcomes

In return for Karyn's time spent on a 12-week (20 hours a week) work placement at Barefoot Books, Tessa Strickland offered her commitment to mentoring Karyn for half-an-hour every week and using this time to explain the basics of:

- The publishing process from concept to delivery, including ideas, manuscript assessment, commissioning, contracts, editing, design, repro, print, delivery.
- Publishing in transition as a manufacturing business in a digital age.
- Information flow between editorial and production on the one hand, and sales and marketing on the other.
- The business year, including quarterly goals and how these are assessed and reviewed.

The experience demonstrated to Karyn the day-to-day workings of a publishing company. In a very hands-on way, she has observed and participated in all parts of the process of making books. Karyn has been encouraged to contribute her own ideas, as well as learning from those around her. She has taken an active role in reading and evaluating submissions from both unsolicited and solicited well-known authors and illustrators.

Karyn has written formal reports and discussed her findings with Tessa, responding on the company's behalf to the contributors. She has participated in all stages of production and sales from brain-storming about book layouts to writing briefs for illustrators.

Subsequently, Karyn has been offered a further internship to gain work experience throughout the Autumn of 2009, with an extended remit to field customer queries during the industry's busiest period in the run up to Christmas.

Perspective

“It has been rewarding to work with a highly-motivated and talented candidate with a strong sense of language and eagerness to develop professional skills that tie in with her personal ambitions and our own expectations of our workforce.”

Tessa Strickland, Co-Founder & Editor-in-Chief, Barefoot Books

“Tessa's offer to extend the placement and Karyn's positive feedback about the value of the personal support she's been able to tap into courtesy of the mentoring programme are both indicators of the potency of this type of programme in terms of student development.”

Ian Rowe, Placements Officer, Bath Spa University

“From start to finish this experience with an industry mentor has been the most valuable part of my time at Bath Spa. Without the support and guidance of the industry mentor programme, I feel I would not have known how to go about obtaining the best learning from such an experience. The structure has ensured that the experience is mutually beneficial and fair.”

Karyn Sailstad,
Student in MA Creative Writing,
Bath Spa University



Ian Rowe

Bath Spa University's Business Support Office acts as a catalyst for engaging with employers, providing enterprise opportunities for students and graduates, and maximising on the expertise of the university for the benefit of the local business community. For further information, contact the Business Support Office at businessenquiries@bathspa.ac.uk www.bathspabusiness.com