



response. ability. theatre.

RAT LAB cohort 2:

November 2026-October 2027

APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN!





We are looking for 4 creatives who identify as living with or at risk of post-traumatic stress, who are in the early stages of developing an artistic project through which they hope to affect change in a topic that matters to them.

Over the course of a year (November 2026-October 2027), these creatives will each:

- take part in 9 group mentoring sessions with other cohort members (11am-1pm once a month from November 2026 to July 2027, usually Sunday mornings but possibly with occasional Saturday mornings);***
- lead 4 paid short R&D workshops for RAT's wider post-traumatic community (during afternoons on the same day as morning group mentoring sessions) to experiment with emerging creative ideas;***
- receive a creative budget to prepare and deliver a 15-minute work-in-progress extract performance or presentation at a sharing event in September 2027;***
- have up to 12 creative and professional coaching sessions with RAT's Founder and Creative Lead, Nell Hardy, to guide their progress through the programme.***

Why do survivors need this?

It can feel almost impossible to get artistic projects off the ground in this climate: from funding, to programming, to audience engagement, the cards are stacked against us higher than ever.

If you're a survivor, the picture is even more extreme.

Everyone knows fundraising is exhausting – but what if you've experienced homelessness or poverty or spent too much of your life chasing up benefits applications, and asking for money feels like begging?

Everyone knows programmers aren't keen on taking risks at the moment – but what if you've been neglected your whole life and not getting any response to your e-mails makes you feel physically unsafe? What if someone wants your lived experience, but wants to do their own thing with it rather than valuing your artistic purpose?

Audiences are hard to build now that so many people have less money and free time. And when the people you're trying to reach have historically been excluded from mainstream arts spaces, or are people who need to (and possibly don't want to) open their eyes to uncomfortable truths, even getting the message to them can be an Everest – let alone convincing them to come.

And that's not even mentioning all the additional factors that come to bear with work inspired by lived experience.

How much of my true story do I want to bring?

How do I figure out how to bring other survivors on the journey?

How do I find collaborators who have the skill sets I need and will stick with me through the tough times?

Our founder Nell Hardy discovered these barriers the hard way when making her first couple of shows, and urgently wants to prevent other survivors from having to go that journey alone.

What have last year's associates said about the programme?

"This programme has given me the confidence to trust my creativity and recognise that it doesn't have to fit conventional expectations to be valuable. It encouraged me to explore ideas in ways that feel authentic to me."



"Flexibility and adjustments meant that I was able to continue to participate at my own pace."

"I finally understood that the journey IS the point, and not knowing the final destination or how long it will take to get there is not a deficit."



"It takes one person to believe in you and your ideas. I allowed myself to trust this process."



"It has made me feel like perhaps my voice does have a place in the world and restored my hope at times when I've lost it."



"This is such a rare opportunity, as people who have experienced trauma are often hesitant to take risks due to disappointment and fear of perceived failure. A supportive framework like this meets needs that just aren't considered elsewhere."

***We know that some survivors
don't like too much information,
and others want allllllllll the
information all at once...***



***So if you're the first kind, you
can find out how to apply on the
last page. If you're the second
kind, read on for some FAQs!***

How can I find out more about RAT and the programme before I apply?

The most immediate thing you can do is check out our website and our blog posts to get a sense of our ethos and remit:

www.responseabilitytheatre.com

Best thing you can do though, is come see us in person!

*We're running three **introductory full-day sessions** between August and October at Old Diorama Arts Centre that are totally open access. Just turn up!*

They are 11am–5pm on:

Sunday 30th August – checklist for developing a theatre/arts project with an activism element

Sunday 27th September – how to talk and write about your work

Sunday 25th October – facilitation skills and finding your style



*You're also welcome to come and see our current cohort present some of what they have been working on at their sharing event, **RAT LAB LIVE**, on **Friday 11th September**, 5:30–9pm (programme starts at 6pm) at Siobhan Davies Studios. Book your free ticket at ***bit.ly/ratlablive2026****

What do you mean, “experiencing or at risk of post-traumatic stress”?

Good question!

Please don't worry if you don't have an official diagnosis. A lot of survivors intentionally steer clear of psychiatry and traditional mental healthcare. Others get lumbered with other diagnoses that never feel right. Complex post traumatic distress disorder has only been recognised in any diagnostic handbooks since 2022, so a lot of guesswork has been happening in the meantime.

We are looking to support creative people whose experiences have made them passionate about making a mark on the cultural, socioeconomic and/or systemic issues that have held them and people like them back, through theatre and/or storytelling – but who need support with the practical, emotional and mental health challenges of doing so.

If you have experienced something distressing that has changed your life course in a significant way – be that a one-off event, a contained period in your life, or a set of relational patterns that have been present from a very young age – and you are aware of the impact of that affecting how you show up in the world, then you are eligible to apply.

If the information above about why we set up the programme resonates with you and your experiences of trying to lead on your creative voice and aims, then this programme could be right for you.

I don't live in London. Can I apply?

You're welcome to apply from anywhere in the UK, but all of our sessions will be in person in London (except coaching, which will either be in London or online). We can cover travel costs for associates coming to us from outside of London up to £25 per activity day (with receipts), but if your journeys cost more than that, you will need to cover the rest of the cost yourself. We are also unfortunately unable to cover the cost of overnight stays.

Because of this, we anticipate that most of our applicants will be based in or near London. We also hope our associates will continue being part of and contributing to the community beyond their tenure, and most of our work is based in London.

Tell us more about the money?

You'll run four workshops of 1hr10mins each spread out between December and July. We'll pay you for 1.5hrs at each. For those that fall within this financial year, that comes to £75.75 each; for those that come after, it might be a little more than that to account for inflation.

For the sharing, we'll give you 4 paid days: one for prep, two for rehearsal, and one for the sharing day. We'll also give you 3 paid days for two collaborators of your choosing: two for rehearsal, one for the sharing. We can book you a rehearsal space for up to 2 days, and cover some materials up to £100. Our current day rate is £176: again, this may go up a little before the time comes to account for inflation.

How developed does my project idea have to be before I apply?

We want you to come into the programme with a pre-existing idea because that will provide a frame for your learning – but ultimately we are developing you, not one specific project. So it doesn't matter if you have nothing more than an initial concept. It also doesn't matter if what you end up developing on the programme is completely different to what you started with.

What we are looking for is thoughtfulness, courage, curiosity, creativity (of course!) and a commitment to championing survivor leadership.

I don't really know if I'm an artist of any kind, but I'm a survivor and I really want to affect change. Can I apply?

Creativity takes many forms and comes out in many ways. Theatre happens on stages, but it also happens anywhere else you can find people learning more about each other and themselves.

We ask to see an example of your work. That might be a scene of a play, or a movement piece, or an illustration, or a song. It might also be an academic paper, or a journalistic article, or an event or workshop plan. We'll be looking for creativity and curiosity in your approach to your change-making – in other words, that you think like an artist – but take a broad view of what that might look like in practice.

I actually already have a few projects under my belt, but I can feel each one taking its toll on me because I haven't had the chance to do this kind of work on myself. Can I apply?

Oh my goodness, we hear you! Absolutely yes, you can apply. We want to sustain and strengthen the survivors who are already out there making it happen any which way, just as much as we want to support those who are only just beginning. In any cohort, we're likely to want to get a mixture of those with and those without much experience. We think inexperience and experience can teach each other equally valuable lessons.



I'm a visual artist/musician/writer, not a theatre maker. Is this programme relevant to me?

If what you do or make tells or generates a story in some way, and you are trying to help people understand themselves and each other better through it with the aim of some kind of social change, then it may well be. All art forms can feature in theatre, so your skill set will certainly be welcome in a theatre company!

It's worth mentioning though, that the programme is led by someone whose experience of survivor-led making is in theatre – so if you're looking to find out how to get your work into art galleries or navigate getting a record deal, we might not be able to help much. If you're more broadly exploring your survivor identity as a purposeful storyteller, and navigating the challenges of that life, we might be right for you.



This sounds great but I don't think I'm ready for it yet. For how many more years do you expect to offer it?

So far, we know from our funding agreements that we can (and indeed have to!) offer a version of this for at least the next four years. That's already a really decent chunk of time. But we feel as confident as we can feel that we will keep going beyond that time.

(Disclaimer here that we're a bunch of trauma survivors and that sets something of a bar on how confident we can feel about this kind of thing, but you know what we mean!)

So please don't apply if it feels like the wrong time. You can still benefit from the programme in the meantime by taking part in the monthly RAT LAB afternoon sessions run by the associates. And, especially if you're trying to work out whether or not this is the right time for you, we strongly recommend that you attend our introductory sessions in August, September and October to get a feeling for it.



If I apply this year and don't get in, does that mean I shouldn't try again?

No. No, no, no. And – did I mention, no?

We only have 4 spaces every year. We haven't had open applications before so don't know how competitive it will be, but we can guarantee there are a lot more than 4 people out there who we'd love to support! Choices each year are far more likely to come down to getting the right balance in the cohort, than to getting the "best" or "only good" people.

We will offer brief feedback to anyone who gets through to interview stage but isn't selected. Hopefully that feedback will help you to decide the approach you take to the next application. If our feedback is very simply that you would have been selected if the cohort make-up had worked out differently, we will give you the option of going straight to interview the next year, so you don't have to write a whole new application – and the interview would just be a matter of catching up.



Advice from the first cohort

“Trust the process, even when it feels challenging. This programme is less about the final outcome and more about the journey, learning about yourself, your creativity, and what you want to say to the world. With an amazing coach, you’ll have plenty of opportunities to have fun, be creative, and be part of a supportive community.”

“Don't overthink it, or think that you need to have a clearly structured plan. There is room to dream.”



“Be daring, be challenging, be kind.”

“If you want to be supported by a holistic development programme that understands the survivor journey; that will see you as a person and not a deliverable, then RAT LAB is for you. Go for it – take creative risks, try things out knowing that RAT will be there to catch you if you fall. You will be challenged on this programme, but at a level accessible to you.”

How to apply

Fill out our application form:

bit.ly/ratlabapp2026

Applications close at midnight on
Sunday 20th September.



*We will then carry out some informal
interviews before selecting the cohort by the
end of October.*

*We will respond to everyone who applies to
inform them of the outcome.*