

Client Spotlight: Josephine McCrann

Durham Small Business Opportunity Loan Fund

For Josephine McCrann, movement has always been a way of life. From dancing and playing soccer as a kid to starting yoga as a teenager, her passion for activity has always fueled her.

That passion turned into a profession for McCrann, who returned to her home studio in Southern Pines, North Carolina following college to do her teacher training in 2012-13. A few years later, McCrann began managing a studio for the first time in Durham.

She leaned on that experience as a studio manager and in 2017, along with two other entrepreneurs with passions for dance and music, opened Threehouse Studios in Durham to create a community space for people to explore their passions. Originally a studio for music as well as dance and yoga, Threehouse has transitioned into a movement studio featuring a wide variety of different yoga and dance classes.



"In my teacher training, we did a 10-year plan exercise," says McCrann. "I wrote down that I wanted to have a community space that included yoga but wasn't just yoga. I wasn't even thinking that I wanted to be a business owner, I just wanted to do the things that I wanted to do. But then we had the seedlings of an idea, and when a space was available it grew from there."

Threehouse Studios has brought together a strong community of others passionate for movement in Durham, and six years after opening, it is still bringing that community together. But as was the case for so many small businesses, Threehouse Studios was hit hard by the pandemic. And while it was never a part of the business plan to offer virtual classes, that was the only option for months on end for McCrann.

This presented not only a big learning curve, but also meant lower class attendance over time. Eventually Threehouse Studios pivoted to offering online classes as well as in-person classes in their parking lot, and finally they moved back inside at a limited capacity when local guidelines allowed it.

To add to the hardships presented by the pandemic, Threehouse Studios faced another setback in December 2020 when the front of their original home on Lakewood Avenue in Durham was severely damaged when a car crashed into the building. With the support of its community, Threehouse Studios found a new home on Morehead Avenue in Durham and reopened shortly after.



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But between the financial hardships of the pandemic and being forced to move locations, Threehouse Studios was in need of capital assistance. “The pandemic was miserable for everyone,” says McCrann. “It just felt like pivot after pivot. As a small business, we didn’t have a huge infrastructure of support. Those pivots felt so hard to navigate. We were looking for all different types of ways to bridge the gap to the other side.”

For McCrann, seeking that financial assistance wasn’t a fond experience. She found herself copying and pasting countless applications to small business support programs, going through hoops without finding aid. “It was disheartening and really frustrating,” says McCrann.

Finding something more local was key for Threehouse Studios, and McCrann learned about Carolina Small Business Development Fund (CSBDF) through a student in one of her classes that had received funding from CSBDF for her own small business.

For McCrann and Threehouse Studios, the experience with CSBDF was different and much more personable than any other loan program they had applied to before. “It was really easy and really helpful,” says McCrann. “Sometimes you come across things where there’s so many hoops to jump through. But with Carolina Small Business Development Fund, the communication was very clear. The people were very patient. It was helpful to have people who understood how much we had going on. It was very nice to have a person attached.”

McCrann applied for a loan through the Durham Small Business Opportunity Loan Fund, a partnership between CSBDF, the City of Durham, and Durham County that provides affordable financing to Durham-based businesses, and received funding in 2022. “The loan has helped with some pandemic debt and really helped bridge those gaps,” says McCrann. “It’s also helped to grow our teacher roster and our payroll. It helped ease the heaviness of the pandemic.”

As Threehouse Studios continues to grow and thrive, McCrann aims to continue building community in the Durham studio. Threehouse Studios has hosted two movement retreats already, expanded its class schedule, offers yoga teacher training, and overall is moving forward through the adversity of the pandemic. “We have started offering retreats, which is a dream come true,” says McCrann. “Carolina Small Business Development Fund has helped us feel comfortable being able to grow.”