

Dance with Older People: Diane Amans Dance Activities Training and TURNS



This case study provides details of the long term support provided by bait to increase the amount and quality of opportunities for arts provision linked to movement and dance for older people.

An initial project, ‘Diane Amans Dance Activities Training’¹, provided specialised training for dance artists and health and social care practitioners, staff and volunteers who wanted to gain skills, knowledge and experience in leading dance activities with older people within South East Northumberland.

A subsequent project entitled ‘TURNS’, was commissioned to extend understanding amongst existing and new audiences of how older people can engage with dance. The work will feature “A Long Side”, a high quality new dance piece for film developed with older people in South East Northumberland. It will be presented in an exhibition at Woodhorn Museum running from 8th October 2016 to March 9th 2017 alongside a new body of photographic work documenting the making of the film.

¹ Diane Amans is the founder of Freedom in Dance, and a leading practitioner and training consultant. She writes regularly for a range of professional publications and is an invited speaker at conferences around the world. Her career has included working in education (schools, FE and Open University), managing dance projects in diverse community settings and continuing professional development in the arts as well as in health and social care.

Project Information

Project aims

The Diane Amans Dance Activities Training provided training for 13 dance artists, staff and volunteers from organisations including Age UK, the Royal Voluntary Service² (RVS) and care homes working with older people within South East Northumberland in dance activities. The training also aimed to support them to implement the training and develop a wider appreciation for dance.

The TURNS dance commission aimed to:

- Enable an established choreographer and film maker to make a new dance piece for film, working with older people in South East Northumberland;
- Create a high quality artwork that enables the dance movement of older people to be visible and celebrated;
- Create an opportunity for people in South East Northumberland who have worked with Diane Amans on the dance training programme to further develop their understanding of dance; and
- Extend the understanding among existing and new audiences of how older people can engage with dance through screenings of the film in South East Northumberland as well as national and international events.

Target participants

A range of participants have been involved and engaged in one or both projects.

The initial dance training was designed and delivered by dance artist, choreographer, author and training consultant Diane Amans to a selection social care staff, exercise professionals and dancers from South East Northumberland. In putting the training into practice in their own settings, participants would be able to ensure that the benefits of the original training touched a wide range of older people across South East Northumberland and beyond.

The production of the film has revolved around the 'Elderflowers' group comprised of 18 older people (one with a carer and others with varying mobility). The group meets every Monday at Pegswood Community Hub to engage in a range of activities including dancing and performing arts before having lunch. The preparation for the filming and support during the week of filming was aided by the Grand Gestures Dance Collective, a Gateshead-based dance group with a focus on celebrating the creativity and beauty of the older dancer which is facilitated by dancer and choreographer Paula Turner³.

Project partners

The key partners across the range of projects included:

- **bait** Creative People and Places programme as commissioner. Arts and Health Manager **Lisa Blaney** as Project Lead
- Dance artist, choreographer, author and training consultant, **Diane Amans**

² The Royal Voluntary Service is a volunteer organisation that enriches the lives of older people and their families across Britain. It supports older people by giving time and practical help to help them get the best from life. <https://www.northumberlandlife.org/RoyalVoluntaryService/AboutUs.asp>

³ <http://www.paulaturner.org/>

- Project Coordinator, **Mileva Donachie**
- Artist and moving-image maker, **Lucy Cash**
- Choreographer and Director, **Emilyn Claid**
- Assistant filmmaker, **Luke Pell**
- Dancer and choreographer, **Paula Turner**
- Artist, photographer, filmmaker and designer **Frances Anderson**
- Public Programme Manager at Woodhorn Museum, **Liz Ritson**

Project activities

The Diane Amans Dance Activities Training provided a five day course for practitioners, staff and volunteers who wanted to gain skills, knowledge and experience in leading dance activities with older people. Delivered in May/June 2014 and repeated as a two day course in March 2015, the training aimed to increase engagement in dance by approximately 100 older people over a 12 month period. The course content incorporated:

- Practical ideas for dance with older people;
- An overview of the ageing process and how this impacts on safe practice in community dance;
- Duty of care and risk assessment;
- Creative use of props; and
- Starting points for creating dance which challenges stereotypes of ageing.

The project has supported participants to deliver and enhance a range of dance and movement sessions with older people. This could be by implementing what they have learnt within their organisation in a new activity or by embedding what they have learnt into an existing activity. Examples include chair exercise and gentle exercise classes delivered by Age UK volunteers, work with care home residents, a community-based dance class, and work with patients on an elderly mental health hospital ward.

Diane observed ten participants delivering dance and movement sessions based on the training in their respective settings and provided practical review sessions and telephone mentoring for six participants.

“The preparation and delivery of training courses and the ongoing follow up activities (observation, mentoring, discussion) have given me food for thought and generated valuable material for my future work.” Nadia Iftkhar

The initial planning for TURNS envisaged a choreographer and film maker working with up to five of the groups supported by those participating in the Diane Amans dance training programme. On reviewing progress however, London-based choreographer Emilyn Claid and film maker Lucy Cash agreed with the local dance artists that the groups were not ready to contribute to the film. For some it was judged unethical given the advanced nature of their dementia whilst others were not deemed to be at a sufficiently advanced stage in terms of their dance/movement to be confident

enough to deal with the filming requirements.

It was agreed that the most realistic and practical option was to work primarily to support one group, rather than spread time and resources across a number of groups in different locations and presenting different challenges. The 'Elderflowers' group of older people who had been meeting in Pegswood for a number of years provided the most viable option. The members had an interest in dancing, had previously benefited from support to learn a variety of different dance styles and had the confidence to cope with the demands of the filming.

The group benefited from ongoing support from Paula Turner who was commissioned to work with the group from September 2015 through to the filming in February 2016. Paula liaised closely with the TURNS choreographer Emilyn through email, Skype and site visits, forming a local link between the 'Elderflowers' and the team originally commissioned to produce the film. Over the course of 22 sessions Paula introduced new techniques and approaches to the group, encouraged experimentation and creative capacity, explored the choreographic material provided by Emilyn and liaised with bait and the film production team to provide information, feedback and reflection as requested.

In addition to developing a close working relationship with the 'Elderflowers', Paula was also able to draw on members of the Grand Gestures Dance Collective she works with. Members of the group were able to provide inspiration and support to the 'Elderflowers' both in the period leading up to, during and after the filming. The filming took place in the first week of March 2016 in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea and Pegswood, both in South East Northumberland. The shoot combined locations on the beach, with filming in the homes of some of the 'Elderflowers' in order to create a choreographic portrayal of their friendships, a sense of community and local stories.

Northumberland-based artist Frances Anderson documented the making of the film, creating a new body of photographic work, "Taking Turns", which will also form part of the exhibition. The 'Elderflowers' will also receive a set of postcards produced from the documentary work. The added value of documenting the project is highlighted in the postcards not only serving as a thank you to the group for their contribution to the project, but also providing a lasting reminder of their experiences, emotions and feelings, off and on camera, generated as part of their journey and inspire future participants.

Key challenges

The project has addressed a number of challenges:

- Ensuring that the training is utilised in the workplace requires both individual and organisational buy-in as well as ongoing support in order to maximise impact and value for money.
- A project which evolves and changes in response to challenges requires both effective and flexible project management arrangements.
- The commissioning of artists from outside of the region provides a range of logistical complexities and costs when working intensively with participants based in South East Northumberland over an extended period of time.

Outcomes and impact - what changed as a result?

Project outcomes

The dance training has provided opportunities for dance artists and social care staff to develop their understanding and application of dance. It has also highlighted opportunities for broadening the scope, and enhancing the quality, of arts-based provision for older people.

The production of the film and associated outputs from TURNS provide a high quality resource through which to celebrate the dance movement of older people. The artwork celebrates the work of the 'Elderflowers' as a piece of art in its own right.

Project impact

Both the initial dance training and TURNS have supported a variety of different individuals and organisations to celebrate and promote quality dance activities for older people. The scale and scope of project impacts will increase as the exhibition begins and the film is screened at more events.

“The preparation and delivery of training courses and the ongoing follow up activities (observation, mentoring, discussion) have given me food for thought and generated valuable material for my future work. The training I experienced is unlike anything else offered in the North East. The quality and experience of the leader is unmatched, which is hugely beneficial. I can rest easy knowing my training is sound and truly embodies the creative case.” Nadia Iftkhar (choreographer and dancer)

A total of 21 dance artists and health and social care practitioners, staff and volunteers have benefitted from high quality training delivered by a dance specialist. Overall feedback highlighted greater levels of engagement and subsequent use of the training by dance artists compared to social care staff who lacked the confidence to implement the training in the absence of a dance professional. This issue has been addressed by bait through subsequent projects outlined overleaf.

The individual members of the 'Elderflowers' group have been seen to grow through their participation in TURNS. The classes leading up to the week of filming were characterised by enhanced levels of confidence as the group became more comfortable with trying new approaches and pushing themselves in a safe and supported environment. In particular Paula reported improvements in the frequency and quality of their movements, stretching and willingness to experiment. Each of these factors will contribute to mental and physical well-being of participants and highlights the potential of dance to contribute to the falls prevention agenda.

“The confidence manifests itself in what they do their movement range, movement potential and expressive capacity (both in body and in speech). As a consequence they understand and own what they do.” Paula Turner

“You're never too old to learn!” Elderflower member

Both the artists and the individual 'Elderflowers' members highlighted the impact of the group's involvement in the film, describing it as providing something to work towards, look forward to and be proud about. In addition, and with implications for tackling isolation amongst older people, the group also highlighted the social value of the project and group, in particular in helping to maintain contact with friends whilst having fun.

“Done lots of things we wouldn’t have done ... otherwise I would’ve been stuck in the house not wanting to come out”

Elderflower member

“I’ve done more than I’ve done in a long time” Elderflower member

The film shoot itself also had a huge impact on the ‘Elderflowers’. They were said to “grow into their roles like seasoned professionals” whilst dealing with the physical demands and repetition of the week’s filming. They were also able to overcome any initial uncertainty or nervousness with the support of a trusted and sensitive group of artists, and in many cases exceed their own expectations of what they could achieve.

“The film week was amazing and they went beyond all expectations in so many ways” Paula Turner

Though the film is primarily a high value arts film, by celebrating the dance movement of older people the film can also help to highlight the associated health and well-being outcomes that can be achieved. The project has highlighted a number of individuals who visibly grew as a result of the experience including one lady who required less support from her carer and gained significantly in confidence both when interacting with the group and when back at her care home.

Legacy

- The Diane Amans Dance Activities Training has informed the approach taken by bait to further embed and test the skills required to engage older people in dance across a variety of settings and with a range of support needs. Additional projects supported by bait include:

- Train the trainer sessions delivered by Diane Amans for 13 staff and volunteers at the RVS with staff encouraged to cascade the training with the support of a training handbook. The training has been used to inform the development of dance and movement sessions in Seaton Sluice in South East Northumberland and the wider county.

“Clients absolutely love them - it helps with mobility, aches and pains ... and laughs! They love the set dances and use of scarves.” Rowan Tinlin, Royal Voluntary Service

- 26 ‘Movement with Memories’⁴ dance sessions for people aged 50 years or more who would benefit from taking part in a friendly social group delivered at the Buffalo community centre in Blyth. The sessions were delivered between April 2015-16 and involved up to eight participants. This group continues to run independently of bait with people paying to participate.

- 37 dance sessions for a group of 30 older people, many of whom have dementia, delivered in a care home in Cramlington between April 2015 and March 2016. The sessions were led by choreographer and dancer Nadia Iftkhar⁵ who participated in the original Diane Amans training and generated anecdotal evidence of improved memory function, confidence and independence amongst participants. The work will be sustained by the setting’s Activity Coordinators who have been provided with the skills, tools (e.g. class plans) and confidence to continue the work.

⁴ <http://www.cvabv.org.uk/docs/684.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.companyofothers.org.uk/bios/nadia-iftkhar-2/>

- The dance training has provided a range of individuals with a resource through which to inform their own, and their organisation's practice. The train the trainer model provides the opportunity to influence the provision of dance and movement sessions across a wide area to the benefit of a significant number of older people.
- The film and related exhibition has the potential to create a lasting impact by raising awareness of the value of movement and dance amongst older people and the potential outcomes in terms of well-being⁶.
- The extent of any legacy will be dependent on the success of bait and its partners in engaging and influencing key decision makers able to help shape dance training and activity. There is potential to explore opportunities to embed learning from the project in adult social care policies and/or business plans as a result of showcasing the work with targeted audiences (e.g. Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), care homes etc.). Initial stakeholders targeted include adult social care staff in leadership, managerial or activity coordinator roles, arts festivals and a range of sector bodies/networks (e.g. People Dancing⁷ and NAPA⁸) and research institutions including the Newcastle University Institute for Ageing (NUIA)⁹ and Alzheimer's Society¹⁰.
- The photographs, quotes and storytelling produced by Frances Anderson in documenting the journey of the 'Elderflowers' will not only add value to the exhibition experience but also provide a lasting individual memory for the participants who made the film possible.

Lessons learnt

Key areas of learning which can inform ongoing and similar activities across South East Northumberland include:

- Lessons from the delivery of the training include the need for a more sustained and intensive relationship between a dance artist and adult social care staff/settings. This can inform both bait's approach to working with the sector but also that of artists and networks/bodies aiming to enhance provision for older people more generally.
- A project seeking to upskill the workforce and enhance the quality of provision within adult social care must contend with a range of sector-wide issues which impact on the ability and willingness of both managers and staff (e.g. Activity Coordinators) to implement change.

“It takes a special person to work in social care”

- Many adult social care staff may be ambivalent or even have negative perceptions of dance activities. Positive results are most likely to be achieved where buy-in is achieved amongst staff in both leadership and direct care roles as part of a values-based approach in adult social care.¹¹
- The physical distance between the key artists and the participants was adjudged by the majority of stakeholders to have contributed to the complexity in project delivery/coordination

⁶ For a summary of the evidence of health and well-being benefits of dance for older people see <http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GettingOn.pdf> and <http://www.cpa.org.uk/information/reviews/shall-we-dance-report.pdf>

⁷ People Dancing People Dancing is 'the foundation for community dance.' It is the UK development organisation and membership body for those involved in creating opportunities for people to experience and participate in dance. <http://www.communitydance.org.uk/>

⁸ The National Activity Providers Network (NAPA) 'supports care teams to enable people to live life the way they choose, with life, love and laughter'. <http://www.napa-activities.com/>

⁹ The NUIA vision and mission is to 'translate internationally renowned research into the biological, medical and psychosocial determinants of healthy ageing across the life course into interventions that extend healthy lifespan and support active ageing'. <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ageing/>

¹⁰ <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/site/scripts/documents.php?categoryID=200119>

¹¹ <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Recruitment-retention/Values-based-recruitment-and-retention/Values-based-recruitment-and-retention.aspx>

and costs (i.e. the delivery was at times too intensive due to the logistics involved for both the creative team and participants).

- The role played by Paula Turner in providing the link between the 'Elderflowers' and the choreographer and filmmaker was pivotal to the success of the project.
- The support and inspiration offered by the Grand Gestures Dance Collective to the 'Elderflowers' was influential in adding value to the participant experience and the eventual film. This highlights the value and potential impact of peer-to-peer relationships within work with older people.
- The process of documenting the project process through a range of media can add real value to both the participants experience and stakeholders interested in applying the good practice. This process would also have been very powerful if applied to the group of older people with dementia.
- The quality of the film produced can be directly linked to the quality of the commissioned artists but also the budget made available for hiring high quality cameras and sound equipment.
- Without the flexibility in project management and a willingness by the bait team to take risks it is unlikely that the project outputs would have been achieved.

Replicability

The following are highlighted as top tips for replicating this project:

- Delivering intensive dance training for adult social care staff (e.g. Activity Coordinators) which includes structured sessions with a dance artist in the care setting. This should ideally be accompanied by a financial contribution or guarantee of staff time allocated to dance activities to ensure buy-in and sustainability.
- The provision of a training handbook to complement train the trainer courses facilitates the efficient dissemination of learning through a cascade model.
- Maintaining relationships between participants through regular contact (e.g. an artist in residency approach) is especially valuable when working with older people who may require reassurance or additional support to overcome barriers to participation.
- Documenting the process of engagement and delivery can add significant value to an artistic product for both participants, stakeholders and future audiences.

Evidence of progress against Theory of Change

Ambition: to make a change in levels of participation in quality arts activity

The project has supported a range of activity which will increase the participation levels of older people in dance and movement sessions in both the short and longer term. The number of older people participating in the arts will continue to increase as the dance training provided is put into practice by those supported. In particular, the train the trainer approach offers a model through which to expand the number of dance artists and health and social care practitioners, staff and volunteers active in South East Northumberland.

Ambition: to involve local people

The project has involved local people both in the initial training, the application and testing of that

training and the production of the film. Indeed the film is heavily influenced by the life experiences of the 'Elderflowers' group and the local environment. The exhibition will also attract a significant number of visitors from the local area as well as stakeholder and sector representatives from further afield.

Ambition: to demonstrate the benefits to well-being of quality arts activity

The project has demonstrated the benefits to well-being of quality arts activity, albeit reported qualitatively based on a small number of participants. People participating in dance sessions delivered in the Cramlington care home are stated to have gained not only in confidence but also in cognitive function and behaviour, adding to the evidence base when working with older people with dementia.

In addition, both the artists involved in working with the 'Elderflowers', and the group themselves, highlighted improvements in the frequency and quality of their movements, stretching and willingness to experiment. All these factors will contribute to increased mental and physical well-being.

Ambition: to leave a sustainable legacy of enhanced capacity, resources and infrastructure for the arts in South East Northumberland

The project leaves a primary legacy in the enhanced skills and experience of the individuals and organisations supported to deliver quality dance and movement work with a range of older people including people in receipt of care and support. The train the trainer model has the potential to sustain activity and the related impacts as skills and knowledge are disseminated and repeated within organisations.

The project also has the potential to inform research and practice in engaging older people in dance by influencing key agencies and networks in dance, physical activity and adult social care. The production of the film and work planned to share, distribute and use the artwork therefore has the potential to influence change both within South East Northumberland but also across the UK and beyond.