

# An Evaluation of the Impact of a Creative Contemporary Dance Programme for Older Adults



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*Dance Elders Performance Company in rehearsals (2023)*



**“I feel that this [Dance Elders] is one of Northampton’s best kept secrets! The group is really good, it should be duplicated all over the country...” (Dance Elder, Performance Company)**

## **Introduction and aim**

### **Background**

The Elders Dance Company was established by Dancemind in January 2020, providing a contemporary dance programme for people over 60 years old, in Northamptonshire. This year (2023) Dancemind delivered a 2 stranded version of the programme (re-named Dance Elders) offering an 'Open Class' – a class for dancers to enjoy creative contemporary dance without the pressure of performance – and a 'Performance Company' - a group focused on developing a performance company and being part of a Midlands network of Elders' companies. For the first time since its inception, both groups were open to social prescribing with the dance facilitators working with local social prescription services. The dance programme ran over three terms, with sessions occurring once a week (1 hour for the open class and 1 hour for the performance company directly following the open class). This was the structure of delivery for the first two terms. In term 3, the day of delivery changed and Dancemind delivered an hour of dance to all dancers, followed by a session for the performance company. These adjustments to the structure of the open and performance classes stemmed from low participation in the performance company. Participant feedback from terms 1 and 2 highlighted financial constraints, with some feeling excluded from the core dance exercises if participating in the performance class only. The strategic decision was to designate the open group as the primary offering, with the performance class as an optional add-on featuring reduced fees for accessibility and allowing for the two groups to continue.

Dancers from the performance company also had the opportunity to take part in a curtain raiser performance (performing in the theatre atrium before a show), as well as two exchange events (whole day events that bring together a network of Elders' companies from the Midlands).

### **Dance and Older adults**

Dancing has been identified as a mode of physical activity that can support healthy ageing in older adults due to the associated physiological and psychological benefits (Gronek et al, 2021). Hui et al. (2009) compared the physiological outcomes of older adults in a control group – no intervention – and those in 12-week dance intervention. They found significant improvements from baseline measures in the intervention group for a number of physiological outcomes including, resting heart rate, endurance – assessed by a six-minute walk-test - dynamic balance and balance – assessed by a timed up and go test - and lower limb endurance – assessed using a repeated sit-and-stand test. Skingley, De'Ath

and Napleton (2016) build on these positive outcomes, finding that following a three-month dance and arts programme, older adults showed improvements in posture, shoulder mobility and balance. However, the lack of control group means that causality cannot be inferred. The variety of dance interventions implemented in research makes it difficult to generalise the findings, but review papers help consolidate findings and build a stronger evidence base. Hwang and Braun (2015) conducted a systematic review of the dance intervention literature and found that benefits included significant improvements to muscular strength, balance, and flexibility. A more recent meta-analysis of randomised-controlled trials supports these findings, concluding that dance interventions resulted in significantly improved mobility function and endurance performance compared to control groups (Liu, Shen & Tsai, 2021). However, healthy ageing is not only characterised by physiological outcomes, with psychological outcomes being just as important.

Research into wellbeing in later life by Age UK (2018) reported that the strongest response to the question, what makes life worth living? was the importance of maintaining meaningful engagement with the world around us. A range of factors including social, creative, and physical pursuits and belonging to a community group were measured and it was found that these types of participation contribute to more than a fifth of wellbeing. Dancing incorporates all of these factors, making it a suitable activity for supporting the wellbeing of older adults. In a mixed-methods evaluation of a 'Dance to Health' intervention, various positive outcomes were reported including, high levels of group identity, improved mood and wellbeing, as well as aforementioned physical outcomes such as improved physical control and coordination (Vella-Burrows et al., 2021). Lima & Viera (2007) investigated the use of ballroom dancing as a form of therapy for older adults in Brazil. Following a year of dance classes participants noted five categories of therapeutic meaning for ballroom dancing: fun, health benefits, elicits good dance memories, cultural connections, and socialisation. The findings of these two different studies are consistent with a systematic review of dance therapy in healthy older adults (Pessoa, Neves & Ferreria, 2019), concluding that there were multiple psycho-emotional and social benefits. Specifically noting improved self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and the formation of long-lasting bonds to support coping with the ageing process.

### **Contemporary dance**

One style of dance that is gaining research attention for its role in healthy ageing is contemporary dance. Contemporary dance is a style of interpretive dance that embraces innovation and improvisation, combining moves and techniques from various dance genres. Studies that examined the impact of contemporary dance interventions have noted an improved sense of belonging/community, positive changes to mental health and

cognition, and increased activity and mobility (Coubard et al, 2011; Britten, Addington & Astill, 2017; Southcott & Joseph, 2020; Almqvist, 2021). In an exploration of the lived experiences of older adults' contemporary dance classes, the change in participants self-image was the main finding (Almqvist, 2021), no longer labelling themselves as 'too old' as their bodily experience of ageing challenged their preconceptions. Key themes included the transformation from 'what' to 'who' - participants experienced a shift in the classes from being viewed as an old person to being seen as a human being – and the shift from 'other' to 'equal' - participants felt involved in the creative process and thus equal to the instructors. These shifts in self-image facilitate a sense of belonging in the contemporary dance classes, and in turn improved wellbeing. With a different focus on cognitive function, Coubard et al. (2011) conducted a matched group study investigating the impact of contemporary dance on attentional control of older adults, compared to fall prevention programmes and tai chi. They found that whilst neither programme influenced attention setting and suppressing, contemporary dance improved attention switching with no effect resulting from the other two programmes. Thus, suggesting that contemporary dance improves cognitive flexibility.

## **Methodology**

This evaluation aimed to understand the experiences and impact of being part of a creative contemporary dance group for older adults. To address this aim various qualitative methods were applied. For all aspects of data collection participant information sheets were provided and informed consent gained. Ethical approval to conduct this research was gained from the Faculty of Arts, Science and Technology Research Ethics Committee, University of Northampton (30<sup>th</sup> January 2023).

### **Data collection**

#### **Researcher observations**

The observations were guided by a template that focused on the session activities, perceived mood of the dancers and any changes in wellbeing, as well as the approaches taken by the facilitators to engage and support the dancers.

#### **Weekly collage (image elicitation)**

The image elicitation activities took the form of a 'weekly collage' that involved creating an A0 poster for each group with photos of them engaging in the dance classes. Participating dancers provided comments on post-it notes expressing how they felt at the end of the class each week and displayed them on the posters. Figures 1 to 4 show the

final collages from both groups in terms 1 and 2. Figure 5 shows the final collage from the combined groups for term 3.

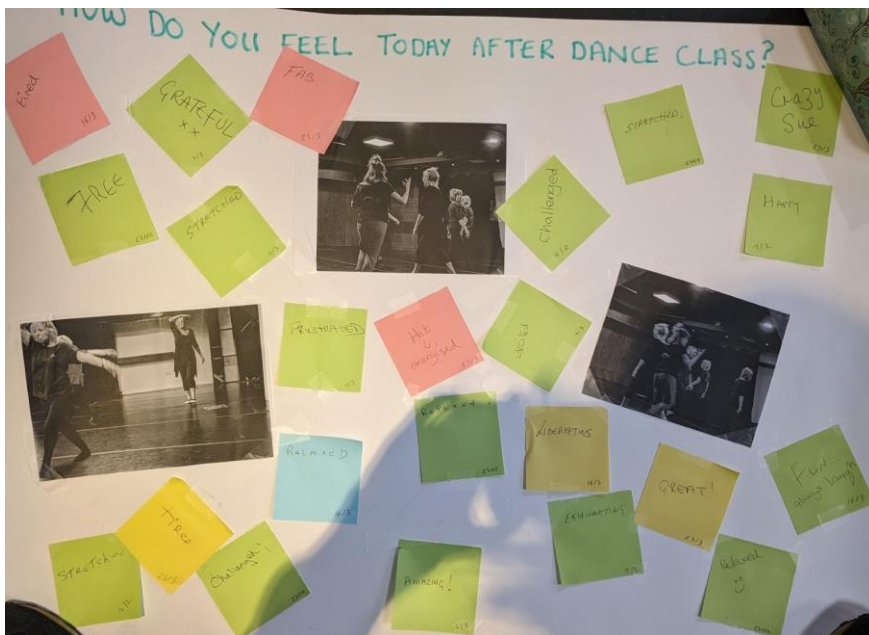


Figure 1 – Open Class (end of term 1)

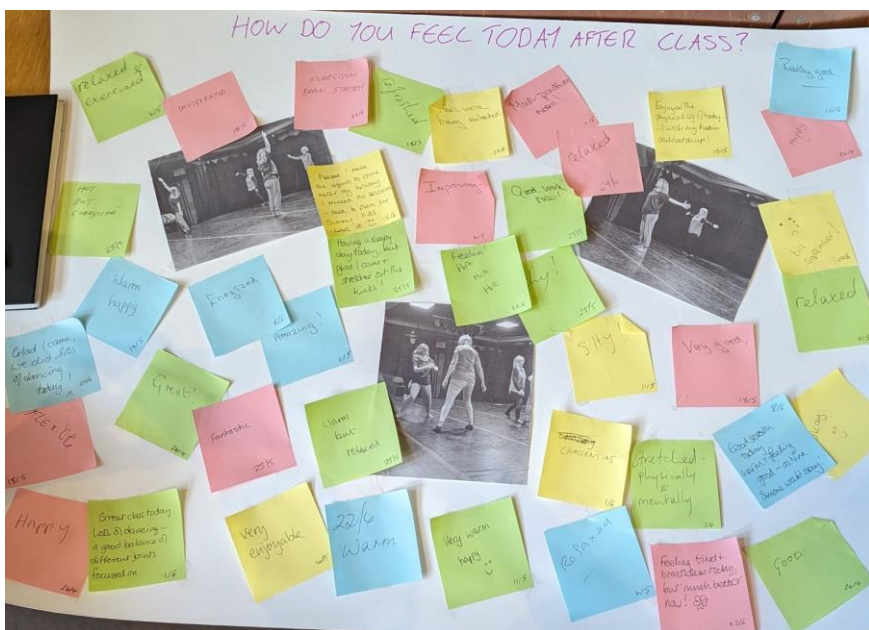


Figure 2 – Open Class (end of term 2)



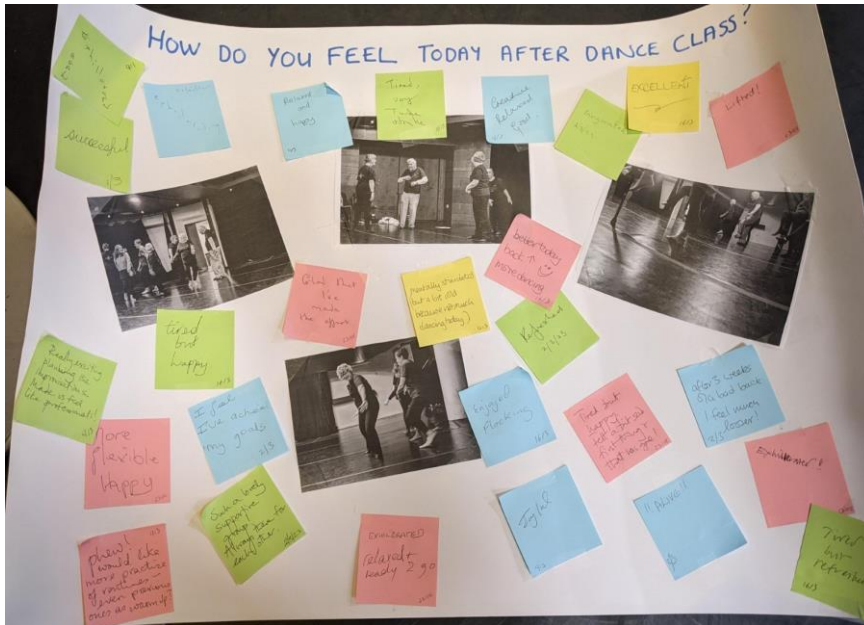


Figure 3 – Performance Company (end of term 1)

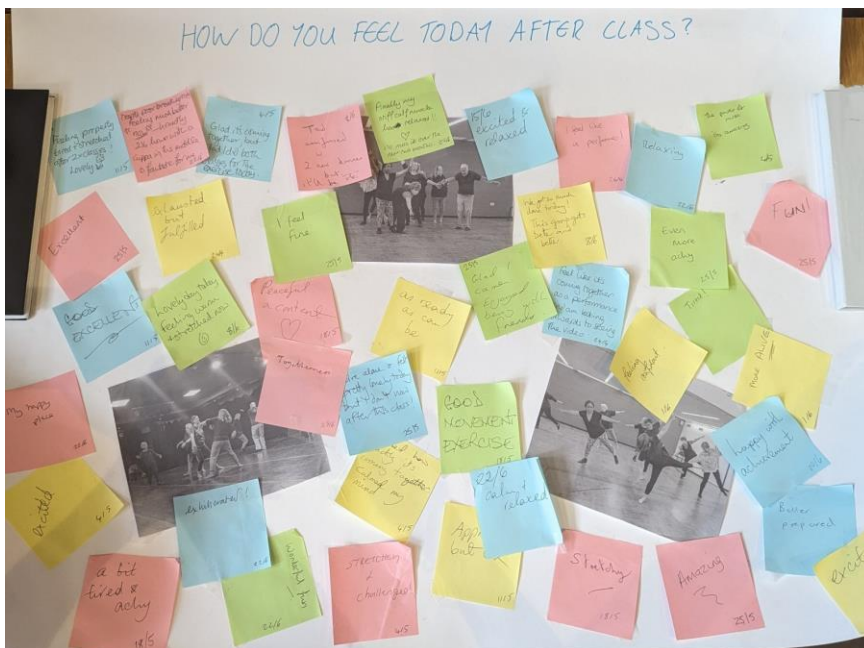


Figure 4 – Performance Company (end of term 2)



comprised of mainly qualitative questions aimed at capturing the views and experiences of dancers following these unique events. All seven individuals involved in the curtain raiser performance completed the questionnaire, six of the dancers that attended the first exchange event (June) completed the questionnaire, and seven dancers completed the second exchange event (November) questionnaire.

### **Dancer demographics and recruitment**

Dancers were recruited to both the open class and performance company through the Royal & Derngate (local theatre), where the weekly sessions took place. There was the option to self-refer or be referred by a social prescribing link worker/organisation through local social prescription services. The criteria to join the Dance Elders group was to be over 60 years old and be able to move independently. Numbers fluctuated over the weeks as new dancers joined the groups throughout the terms. Term 3 had the highest number of dancers with 25 in total, 10 of which formed the Performance Company. Participation in this evaluation was voluntary, requiring written informed consent from all dancers who wanted to be involved. Most dancers in the sessions gave their consent to participate, and those that did not were omitted from any data collection. All dancers gave verbal consent for photos to be taken by the dance organisation to be used for marketing purposes. Table 1 shows dancer demographics from respondents of questionnaires.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected from the telephone interviews, weekly collages, questionnaires, and researcher observations were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the six stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021): data familiarization; data coding; initial theme generation; developing and reviewing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; writing up thematic analysis.

**Table 1 - Dancer Demographics**

(collated from questionnaire data – only includes details from questionnaire respondents and not ALL Dance Elders)

Age	Sex	How did you first hear about Dance Elders?	Ethnicity	Post code	When did you start with Dance Elders?	Which group do you attend?
71	Female	Chronicle and Echo	White-British	NN7	September 2022	Performance Company
78	Male	Internet	White-British	NN1	September 2022	Performance Company
67	Female	Facebook – Royal & Derngate	White-British	NN7	January 2020	Both
69	Female	Northants Telegraph	White-British	MK43	January 2020	Both
63	Female	My friend	White-British	MK19	September 2022	Performance Company
61	Female	Another member invited me	White-British	MK46	January 2022	Both
71	Female	Royal & Derngate Website	White-British	NN3	October 2022	Performance Company
70	Female	Leaflet	Any other ethnic background	NN5	January 2022	Performance Company
69	Female	Facebook	White-British	NN4	May 2021	Open Class
70	Female	Friend/flyer	White-British	NN7	January 2023	Open Class
69	Female	Museum leaflet	White-British	NN1	January 2022	Open Class
78	Female	On museum website	White-British	NN2	Cannot remember – 3 <sup>rd</sup> term	Open Class
65	Female	Facebook	White-British	NN6	January 2023	Open Class
74	Female	Leaflet in Franklins	White-British	NN7	January 2023	Open Class
79	Female	Royal & Derngate	White-British	NN2	January 2020?	Performance Company
63	Female	A friend	White-British	MK15	Easter 2022	Performance Company
66	Female	A friend	White-British	NN3	September 2023	Open Class

66	Female	Leaflet in Royal & Derngate Theatre	White-British	NN3	September 2023	Open Class
74	Female	Friends invited me to join	White-British	NN7	September 2023	Open Class
66	Female	Royal & Derngate Foyer	White-British	NN6	September 2023	Open Class
68	Female	Royal & Derngate website	White-British	MK4	September 2023	Open Class

## Research Findings

The qualitative methods yielded a range of findings that have been organised into seven higher order themes. Figures 1 – 5 show the data from the weekly collages.

### Mind and Body

“I think it [Dance Elders] does me good all round, in mind and body” (Participant 3, telephone interviews). The four new dancers who participated in the telephone interviews spoke of the various mental and physical benefits they were noticing after attending the dance classes. They felt that the sessions were exercising more than just their bodies but their minds as well. The ‘mind’ element of the theme reflects the dancers noting the impact on cognitive processes by working to remember the steps and routines. “It’s good for cognitive process, trying to remember things” (Participant 1, telephone interviews) and “I like the mental challenge of learning a routine as well as the dancing” (Respondent 10, End of term 1 questionnaire). This supports the various existing research which evidences some improvements to cognitive function and flexibility as a result of dance (Coubard et al., 2011; Meng et al., 2020) and previous evaluations of the Dancemind programmes (Spencer, 2020, 2021).

In relation to the ‘body’, all dancers from the telephone interviews spoke of the intensity of the dance being just right for their bodies to manage. This would lead to dancers feeling stretched after the sessions. One dancer also noted that by attending the classes regularly they had seen an improvement in their balance. “Physically I think it helps with my balance a little bit more” (Participant 3, telephone interviews).

Whilst recounting the different mental and physical benefits they had experienced, dancers consistently spoke of them together, in partnership. This theme was also reflected in the responses to the weekly collages and the questionnaires. Dancers noted individual impacts

that ranged from general feelings of physical and mental wellbeing to more specific changes such as improved balance or memory.

The appearance of this theme in all aspects of data collection highlights that the dance classes impact mind and body irrespective of when dancers joined the group. Dancers who have engaged in previous Dancemind programmes would speak of the mental and physical benefits with as much significance as new dancers. A dancer who has been with the group since the inception of the original Elders' Dance, noted about their overall experience of Dance Elders:

"Doing something physical that is enjoyable & helps keep me going (-ish). Developing routines week by week which are satisfying - feel I'm still able to learn new stuff" (Respondent 11, End of term 1 questionnaire).

### **Social Connectedness**

"[I feel] happy and enjoying the company of the rest of the group" (Respondent 18, End of term 3 Questionnaire). The social aspect of the dance classes held great significance in the dancers' experiences of the group, as highlighted by the following quote. "The comradery, the chat over coffee afterwards is almost as important as the class" (Respondent 13, End of term 1 questionnaire). The new dancers spoke of feeling welcomed into the group from the first session, and later recalled how they were meeting fellow dancers for coffee and cake outside of sessions – which became a regular event. This social interaction within the group helped to create a relaxed environment for the dance to be taught in. "[Dance Elders] The highlight of my week. It's great to feel part of a group of like-minded people who give incredible support" (Respondent 1, Post-performance questionnaire). In the open class in terms 1 and 2 particularly, there was a notable change in the group dynamics as participants settled into the group, which was recorded in the researcher's observation notes. "[Dancers] Appear comfortable and relaxed in the group – really different energy within the group compared to previous weeks" (from the Week 6 observations of the open class).

The importance of friendships and social connection was echoed by dancers who had engaged in previous Dancemind programmes as well as those new to Dance Elders. Responses to the weekly collage and end of term questionnaires voiced the enjoyment that emerged from the group setting. When asked in the end of term questionnaires what were the three most important things they had gained from taking part in Dance Elders, 'friends' and 'friendship' and 'social interaction' were included in all responses. "Glad I came. Enjoyed being with

friends” (Dancer – Weekly Collage, Performance Company) and notably, reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation, “I Live alone and felt pretty lonely today but I don’t now after this class!” (Dancer – Weekly Collage, Performance Company). Dancers who joined in the final term echoed the experiences of dancers who joined in term one, highlighting their enjoyment of the interactions and feeling like part of the group “I’ve been made [to feel] very welcome by the tutors and other dancers” (Respondent 9, End of Term 3 Questionnaire).

Our findings highlight the relatively short-term benefits social interaction and connection had on the dancers but there is research evidence of the longer-term impact it can have. One systematic review of older adults (over 50 years old) and their social interactions found a relationship between social activity and improvements in a range of cognitive processes – global cognition, executive functioning, working memory, visuospatial abilities, and processing speed (Kelly et al., 2017). Maintaining social relationships has also been shown to decrease the risks of morbidity and mortality (Connolly & Redding, 2010; Holt-Lunstad & Smith, 2012; Cruz-Ferreira et al., 2015; Moreno-Tamayo et al., 2022). Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis, finding an effect size of OR = 1.50 (95% CI 1.42 to 1.59). This shows that individuals with stronger social relationships have a 50% increased likelihood of extending healthy life expectancy.

### **Inspiration and confidence**

“Obviously we've got our own group which is excellent and has grown and evolved into an open group and performance group. What was particularly good about meeting other groups - in person and via videos - was to know that there are lots of people doing what we're doing and that normalises it. That's exactly how it should be. Older people who want to continue to move and stay flexible shouldn't be unusual” (Respondent 2, June Post Exchange Event Questionnaire).

Inspiration was reflected by the dancers’ responses in various ways. For some it was creative inspiration and for others the sessions inspired confidence in them and normalised older people to dance. The quote above captures the latter and gives insight into the benefits that dancers gained from participating in the exchange events (events shared with Warwick Arts Centre and other Elders’ dance groups). Furthermore, a new dancer with a long-term condition, stated that attending the dance sessions had evoked strong emotions of relief that they were “back to normal” and could engage in this (and previous) activity that they once enjoyed. “It [Dance Elders] has inspired me to go back to [ballet fitness] as well” (Participant 4, telephone interviews). This individual recalled becoming

emotional the evening after their first session as they felt so overwhelmed by their ability to attend the class which ultimately made them feel "normal" and confident to attend further sessions. Similarly, another dancer (previously engaged in the Dancemind programmes) expressed inspiration from the knowledge they gained about themselves such as their ability to "still learn new things" (Respondent 7, End of term 2 questionnaire). Further dancers suggested that this increased confidence was credit to the instructors for creating a positive environment within the sessions. "[The instructors] are inspiring. They treat you as an individual and have increased my confidence and mobility" (Respondent 14, End of term 3 Questionnaire) and "Tutors brilliant - not judgemental and bring out the best in everyone. Made new friends and subsequently been introduced to other activities. My confidence has increased due to their faith" (Respondent 6, Post-performance Questionnaire).

### **Inclusive and Accessible**

"Some members have never danced before and some have had a lot of dance experience but they [dance facilitators] manage to make it enjoyable for all which is admirable." (Respondent 3, End of term 3 Questionnaire). Participants felt the weekly dance sessions were inclusive and accessible for a range of reasons, with the main reason being the supportive and non-judgemental environment they experienced, as expressed by one of the new dancers, "The joy of being able to do something in a very caring and supportive environment" (Participant 4, telephone interviews). This helped dancers (especially new dancers) feel accepted into the group and appeared to minimise perceived pressure from others to get steps right. Dancers commented on the instructors' empathy and ability to adapt movements to meet the needs of individuals in the group. "[The instructors] make sure everyone can participate, even if they can't do certain movements. There is never any judgement of limitations" (Respondent 13, End of term 1 Questionnaire).

Another new dancer commented multiple times in different interviews about the affordability of the sessions. Suggesting that even as a self-referral and thus not paying the subsidised rate it is priced very competitively. "I think the price is really good. Even if you are paying for it yourself it's not overly expensive" (Participant 1, telephone interviews). This is further echoed by respondent 2, after the first exchange event, acknowledging that the Dance Elders is accessible and inclusive.

"The [Exchange] event must have taken a lot of organisation, and I'm grateful to everyone involved. I've organised lots of events in the past and I know how much



work is involved for a large-scale event like this to run so smoothly, so thank you for that. I believe that Dance Elders is subsidised and I'm glad that people can get involved who wouldn't be able to pay the full price for weekly sessions and the exchange events. Really important to prevent people being excluded because of low incomes" (Respondent 2, June Post Exchange Event Questionnaire).

### **Investment in group**

An interesting theme to arise from the data was how the dancers had invested so much of themselves in the group. New dancers frequently spoke of their concern over the number of individuals participating in the group, eager for the sessions to thrive and continue. "I would like to see some more (dancers) because I want it [Dance Elders] to thrive" (Participant 1, Telephone interviews). Many were actively pushing advertising material to their local groups and friends, knowing the benefits it was having on them and wanting others to share that experience. "I would like to see more recognition of the group, its leaders and the benefits to be had by taking part, within the community" (Respondent 7, End of term 1 questionnaire).

As the group grew in numbers in the final term, the feelings of investment were directed towards dancers want for a more appropriate space for the sessions to take place in. Due to unforeseen circumstances (the discovery of RAAC in their previous venue), the facilitators were forced to find an alternative location at very short notice. Dancers expressed their want for "a more spacious home" (Respondent 5, End of Term 3 Questionnaire) and were actively searching for new venues that could be utilised in the future. "It would be good to be settled in a permanent dance space once again" (Respondent 13, End of term 3 Questionnaire).

Another strand of investment in the group was the willingness and motivation of dancers to practice routines at home. This was clearly not a session they turned up to once a week and then forgot about until the next session. New dancers frequently spoke of the importance of having the video recordings of their routines so that they could continue to learn and practice at home in preparation for the next session. "I thought, 'We've got the clip so when I get home I'll look at it, break it down slowly and practice myself'" (Participant 1, telephone interviews).

A further dancer commented on the lack of men in the dance groups. At the end of term 2, there were two men involved in Dance Elders – one had joined in the last week of term but did not return for term 3.

"I'm a little sorry that so few men join in with these activities. The groups featured in videos [for the exchange event] had more men as a proportion, but our group and the groups we met had just one or two. Men need this as much as women, - how do we get them involved?" (Respondent 2, June Post Exchange Event Questionnaire).

When writing about normative gender roles, Holdsworth (2013) noted that conforming to 'normative notions of masculinity' start from an early age. This social construction of gender and the gendered associations with dance, has a significant influence on boys' involvement in dance. Working against these culturally, socially and historically embedded gendered ideals, is a slow process. However, in more recent British culture, we have seen the film and musical Billy Elliot (2000), Diversity winning Britain's got Talent (2009) and the successful competitors of various male sporting stars in Strictly Come Dancing (Holdsworth, 2013). These challenges to masculinity are becoming more regular and normalised and perhaps, in time, more men will engage in creative dance and be rewarded with the benefits, as suggested by the dancer above. However, whilst men in dance, particularly among younger generations, is becoming more common place, it is important to note that different generations and their individual experiences will impact on participation in dance.

### **Purpose in performing**

"Feel happier and more purposeful" (Respondent 1, Post-Performance Questionnaire)

Dancers who were part of the performance company worked with the facilitators to develop routines they would later perform at curtain raisers and exchange events. Having a clear goal for the dance sessions gave them a purpose, viewing sessions as rehearsals rather than just an exercise class. One dancer suggested that having a goal "gives you a focus and encourages you to work harder and to attend as often as possible - we all hate missing rehearsals" (Respondent 2, Post-performance Questionnaire). Others noted how the goal of a performance pushed them to remember routines better than in the open class, finding the process of developing a performance piece more meaningful and engaging.

Post exchange event questionnaire responses demonstrate the importance of mixing with other Elders dance groups, as captured in the extract below.

“What was particularly good about meeting other groups...was to know that there are lots of people doing what we’re doing and that normalises it. That’s exactly how it should be. Older people who want to continue to move and stay flexible shouldn’t be unusual” (Respondent 2, June Post Exchange Event Questionnaire).

Dancers enjoyed meeting like-minded people and learning from each other through the various workshops, performances, and films/videos. One dancer sums up the experience in their response “A great experience feeling part of a wider movement. A good learning experience” (Respondent 4, November Post Exchange Event Questionnaire). Throughout the year dancers grew in confidence as a group and came to look forward to these events as an opportunity to showcase their work and socialise as a group as well as with others. “I really look forward to these events, meeting new people, having the chance to perform, seeing some really enlightening films. I’ve been looking forward to this for weeks.” (Respondent 6, November Post Exchange Event Questionnaire). It was evident that the dancers were proud of their work and felt their weekly dance sessions served a greater purpose than just exercise.

### **External negatives**

Across all aspects of data collection, dancers rarely made negative comments toward the dance sessions but when they did, they were directed at external factors. The most common comment was made towards the venue, particular the room that classes took place in (specifically in term 1). This was an ‘underground’ studio in the local theatre, with a low ceiling and no source of natural light. “[The venue] is a bit bleak and this impacted on my mood but does not outweigh other benefits” (Respondent 7, End of term 1 Questionnaire). Dancers felt the room was dingy and sometimes had a smell when you walked in, and dancers who had previously engaged in Dancemind programmes felt the previous venue was much more appealing. Although it should be noted that the previous venue used by Dancemind was no longer available, hence the change to the local theatre.

Furthermore, in the final term dancers expressed their frustrations with the size of the new venue. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the group were forced to find an alternative venue for the sessions to take place. Dancers were understanding of the circumstances but voiced their concerns surrounding the suitability of the venue in regards to the size of the room, not always having the same room, and availability of chairs. “It would be nice to have a bigger space and the same room every time.” (Respondent 2, End of term 3 Questionnaire) and “I wish we had a more spacious home though, and also that we each had a chair available.” (Respondent 5, End of term 3 Questionnaire).

It's important to highlight how despite these external negative factors having minimal effect on the benefits dancers have gained from the sessions themselves, we cannot dismiss how they have dampened the whole experience. Most dancers commented on these issues at least once throughout our data collection, suggesting they were not trivial.

## Conclusions

Respondent 1 from the June post exchange event questionnaire articulates their experience of Dance Elders most eloquently,

I was a total dance virgin, apart from discos. I need the exercise, I've got gym-phobia, this [Dance Elders] is cheaper too! I get exercise, companionship, and a good use of my time. I thoroughly recommend. I hope it continues. (Respondent 1, June Post Exchange Event Questionnaire).

**Achievements and Outcomes:** The experiences of dancers, new and old, in the dance group emphasise how beneficial and important creative, community dance groups like Dance Elders are to older adults. The benefits are only amplified by the supporting research from other areas and programmes of dance research. Dance Elders successfully yielded substantial positive outcomes, significantly enhancing the physical and mental well-being of participants, as seen in the findings from this evaluation. Noteworthy improvements in mood, motivation, and a heightened sense of achievement were reported by participants. This knowledge was produced by rigorous monitoring, facilitated through the evaluation data collection and collaborative partnerships with Arts venues, Age UK and Spring Northamptonshire.

A further outcome of the program is the creation of two videos by Lucy Knight (dance facilitator), that showcase two of the Dance Elders and the impact that dance participation and being part of the group has had on them individually. The links to the videos are provided below:

[Jo's story – Dance Elders Company](#)

[David's story – Dance Elders Company](#)

**Challenges and Adaptations:** Navigating unforeseen venue challenges, specifically the discovery of RAAC within Royal & Derngate mid-project, necessitated an unexpected venue change that initially lacked accommodation for the group's size. Despite these challenges, participants exhibited understanding, offering constructive feedback that contributed to effective problem-solving. The subsequent relocation of our second Dance Exchange to

Warwick Arts Centre showcased a successful partnership, demonstrating adaptability and a supportive community.

Adjustments to the structure of open and performance classes were implemented due to low participation in the latter and participant feedback indicating financial constraints. The decision to designate the open class as the primary offering and the performance class as an optional add-on, with a reduced fee for accessibility, not only surpassed anticipated open class numbers but also ensured ample participation in the performance segment.

**Future Ambitions:** Recognising the need for an effective review of marketing strategies to attract older adults, future ambitions underscore the importance of maintaining a consistent, accommodating space for the dance group to foster a sense of belonging and growth. A new venue has now been secured for Dance Elders to move forward and is in direct response to participants' feedback. Strategies to attract additional participants through the social prescribing route are also in focus for future initiatives.

**Longer term impact:** Dance Elders delivered valuable learning opportunities, challenging goals, and a sense of community to participants, supporting mental clarity, physical health, and preventing cognitive decline. The shared creative experience played a pivotal role in promoting community cohesion, especially in the post-Covid-19 isolation era. The impact of the grant extends beyond immediate benefits, contributing to a strategic, long-term vision for a creative over 60s dance program in Northampton.

**Legacy and Sustainability:** The ACE grant allowed facilitation of a thorough program evaluation, informing future planning for sustained viability. Dancemind aspires to establish a lasting legacy, offering a diverse dance program for Northampton and influencing regional partners. The success of this flagship program positions Northampton as a best practice model, actively contributing to the town's enriched creative and cultural landscape.

*Dance Elders learning a dance routine (Term 3 – combined group)*



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