



Written by Dr Imogen Aujla
<https://www.danceinmind.org>

Project facilitated by Tori Drew
<https://www.movetobemoved.co.uk>

Designed by: Milly Best
[@milly.best.archive](https://www.milly.best.archive)



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that both younger and older people report similar challenges in terms of both physical health and social isolation. Peaks in loneliness among older and younger generations have been documented alongside lower psychological wellbeing.^{1,2} Increased levels of social isolation are reflected in the declining opportunities for meaningful contact between people of different ages and backgrounds. The reduction of shared community spaces such as libraries, youth clubs and community centres – combined with longer working hours, family breakdown, and the proliferation of digital technologies – has limited opportunities for intergenerational contact.

At the same time, rising levels of sedentary behaviour have been reported among both younger and older generations.³ Many older adults face barriers to participating in physical activity, including location, transport, poor physical or mental health, limited social networks and low income. Similarly, young people may face financial and psychological barriers including anxiety and low confidence. Residents of under-resourced communities often encounter additional obstacles, such as cost and limited access to suitable spaces.⁴

One promising response to these challenges is intergenerational activity. The Beth Johnson Foundation defines intergenerational practice as “activities that bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial ways to promote understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities”.⁵ Research suggests that intergenerational programmes can enhance physical and psychological wellbeing, strengthen social relationships and foster a sense of community.⁶

Dance can offer unique benefits within this space. Research into intergenerational dance programmes report high adherence, and indicate that dance can be as effective as conventional exercise programmes across age groups, if not more so.³ Enjoyment is a key factor in sustaining any type of physical activity over time; dance may be particularly motivating due to its combination of movement, music, and creativity.^{3,4} Participants in intergenerational dance programmes have reported feelings of happiness, pride, confidence, inspiration and belonging, with reductions in isolation and social stereotyping.^{7,8} Intergenerational dance has also been associated with numerous health benefits including greater mobility, endurance, and improved cognition and quality of life.^{3,4,7,8}

Taken together, the existing evidence suggests that intergenerational dance may provide an accessible, enjoyable and community-based approach to addressing the challenges of loneliness and physical inactivity that are shared by younger and older people. By bringing generations together in creative and meaningful activity, such programmes have the potential not only to support individual health, but also to strengthen relationships and build more connected communities. This evaluation report documents the impact of an intergenerational dance initiative, Move to be Moved, by exploring the experiences of the people involved.

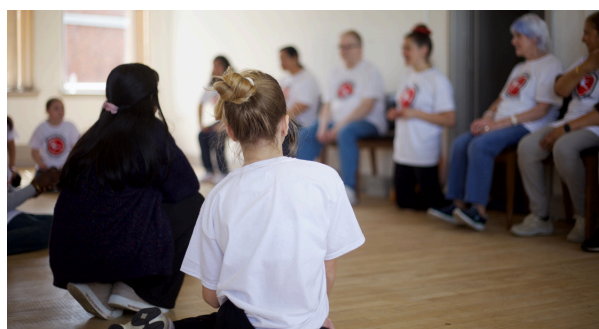
ABOUT MOVE TO BE MOVED

Move to Be Moved was an intergenerational community dance project based in the Black Country, an area which has been identified as a “coldspot” for dance, meaning there are few existing opportunities in the region. The project was designed to creatively connect people across Dudley and Walsall through dance, storytelling, and film by responding directly to local barriers such as limited shared performance opportunities, lack of accessible spaces, and underrepresentation of community dance activity. It positioned community participants not just as audiences, but as co-creators and storytellers, facilitating participation, inclusivity and ambition at all levels of practice.

Over 12 weeks, 4 primary schools (involving young people in from Years 5 and 6) and 4 community-based older adult groups worked with experienced community dance artist Tori Drew. During weekly workshops, participants devised dances, and shared stories about the local area. The history of the region was used as an additional creative stimulus in the schools. For example, young people created dances based on topics such as coal mining, chain making, and leather saddling, fostering pride in their local heritage. A poet, Kurly, composed poems based on the participants’ stories which were shared between the groups. Finally, each school group visited an older adult group to perform their dances and participate in a joint workshop. A dance film was created from these moments of intergenerational connection and was screened at a community celebration event at Priory House, Dudley.

In addition to the main activity, 19 Level 4 students from the BA(Hons) Physical Education (PE) and School Sport at the University of Wolverhampton took part in a 3-hour workshop led by Tori. The students then participated in a workshop where one of the school groups met an older adult group. This furthered the impact of the project by teaching students how to deliver high quality dance within the PE curriculum, and by facilitating connection between three generations in one space.

The work was shared beyond local venues in order to increase the reach of Move to be Moved. This included digital documentation of the project, the evaluation detailed in this report, and a lesson plan to support teaching dance in coldspots, which was designed by Tori and hosted by One Dance UK.



PROJECT EVALUATION METHODS

Move to be Moved was independently evaluated by Dr Imogen Aujla from Dance in Mind. The aim of the evaluation was to capture the experiences of project participants, their motivations for taking part, perceived benefits and any barriers to engagement.

Prior to taking part in the evaluation, all participants gave informed consent. Parental consent was also required for school children. To ensure everyone fully understood what the research involved, older adults and the parents of school children were provided with information sheets. All participants were assured that their participation was anonymous, confidential and fully voluntary, and that they could ask questions or withdraw from the evaluation process at any time.

Observations

Imogen visited one older adult group and one school group to observe the sessions and conduct focus groups

Focus Groups

Six older adults and six young people were invited to take part in focus groups with Imogen during one of the sessions. The focus groups further explored experiences of the project such as perceived benefits and barriers to dance activity

Surveys

Participants were invited to complete a short survey about the project during one of the dance sessions. Survey questions included previous dance experience, enjoyable elements of the project, ways the project could be improved, and which factors motivated participants the most. A total of 37 older adults and 102 young people completed to the survey. Four teachers (one from each school) and 19 PE students also completed a brief version of the survey to provide supplementary information

Interview

Imogen interviewed Tori about her initial impetus for the project, the progress that had been made, and challenges she had encountered along the way

Data were analysed with a particular focus on barriers, benefits and motivation to inform future projects and the development of a checklist to assist other artists who are interested in developing dance projects in coldspot areas.

FINDINGS

The findings presented in this section have been combined from the multiple different sources of data.

BARRIERS TO DANCE



EXPERIENCES & BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT



LOOKING FORWARD : IDEAS AND MOTIVATION FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS



Key demographic information about the two main participant groups is presented in the table below.

 PARTICIPANT GROUP	 EVALUATION PARTICIPANTS (n)	 GENDER	 AGE (Mean $\pm$ SD)	 ETHNICITY (%)	 DISABLED PARTICIPANTS
 OLDER ADULTS	37	35 Female (95%) 2 Male (5%)	 72.54 $\pm$ 8.72 years	84% White 12% Indian 4% Any Other White Background	☒ No = 28 ☒ Yes = 9
 YOUNG PEOPLE	102	51 Female (50%) 51 Male (50%)	 9.95 $\pm$ 0.64 years	62% White 6% Any Other Black/ African/Caribbean/ Black British Background 5% Indian 5% Any Other White Background 4% White & Black Caribbean 3% Any Other Asian Background 3% Any Other Mixed/ Multiple Background 2% Pakistani 2% Bangladeshi 2% African 1% Irish 1% White & Black African 1% White & Asian 3% Any Other Ethnic Group	☒ No = 72 ☒ Yes = 30



REPORTED DISABILITIES



OLDER ADULTS

Most participants reported more than one disability, including mobility impairments, hearing and visual impairments, stamina and breathing difficulties, difficulties concentrating, learning or remembering, mental health conditions, and mild cognitive impairments.



YOUNG PEOPLE

3 participants reported hearing impairments; 14 reported difficulties with learning, remembering, or concentrating; 2 reported mental health issues; 4 reported social or behavioural difficulties; and 7 reported speech and language difficulties.

BARRIERS TO DANCE

Several barriers to dance were reported by participants. Most significant was a lack of opportunity in the area. Older adults struggled to find affordable dance and exercise classes: most had been signposted to the classes by another service such as occupational therapy, suggesting that not only are dance for health opportunities limited, but information about them is also poorly disseminated. Few schools offer dance as part of the curriculum; as one young person noted:

“I’m so happy I got this opportunity – I feel like this is the biggest opportunity we’ve ever gotten.”

The lack of opportunity was related to a number of factors, including little cultural investment in the area, financial barriers to private or independent (as opposed to community) provision and other cultural activities such as theatre visits, and few opportunities for dance artists.

Tori explained that more work was available for dance artists in larger cities like Birmingham and the lack of a local train service was a barrier for dance artists who do not drive. However, the region is well-served by a comprehensive bus network: highlighting this and the forthcoming tram service may help attract artists to the region in the future.

Finally, Tori felt that stereotypes about the Black Country precluded interest from both funders and other artists:

“We’re not a city, we’re not seen as creative – that’s a barrier. But I want to put the Black Country on the map. We are a creative place, and I want to shine a light on that.”

Move to be Moved addressed the above barriers in several ways. Firstly, it removed financial barriers by providing high quality dance provision for no or low cost (the schools were asked to contribute £100).

Secondly, it demonstrated the value of dance to schools and communities that might not otherwise engage in it. As one school teacher explained:

“A lot of the boys didn’t want to do it and they ended up loving it. They are gutted it is ending.”

BARRIERS TO DANCE CTD.

Tori hoped that participation in the project would create a ripple effect, encouraging the partner schools to continue providing dance opportunities, while inspiring others to invest in them:

“This is engaging kids who struggle in school, but they’re thriving in dance – it’s helping to engage and retain young people in education”

The project highlighted the artistic potential of the region, showcasing its vibrancy, diversity and creativity. This was important to not only attract interest from funders and other artists, but also to engender a sense of civic pride among participants. Older adults and young people alike shared their stories and interests with one another to build an artistic community. As Tori explained, *“What brings communities together is people’s stories, people’s lives, where you live. we’re different, but let’s celebrate our place.”*

School children were taught about the history of the area, which many of them were unfamiliar with:

“On the first day, we were learning about the history of the Black Country, and we got to learn that knowledge through dance.”

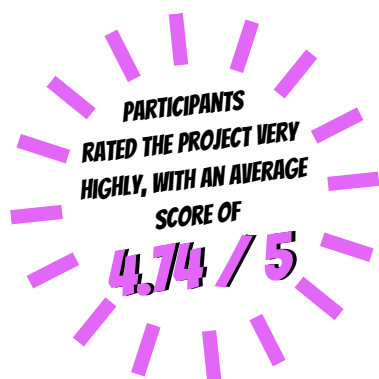
Finally, as with previous intergenerational projects, Move to be Moved helped to breakdown barriers between and reduce stereotypes about the generations involved. Both younger and older people had expressed some anxiety about meeting each other, but reflected afterwards that this collaboration was one of the highlights of the project. As one older adult explained,

“I was worried at the start because I thought young people hate old people but they were so lovely”.

Similarly, a young person noted, *“They weren’t as scary as I thought”*, with another adding, *“they actually have lots of energy.”* The following quote from an older adult summarises this outcome well:

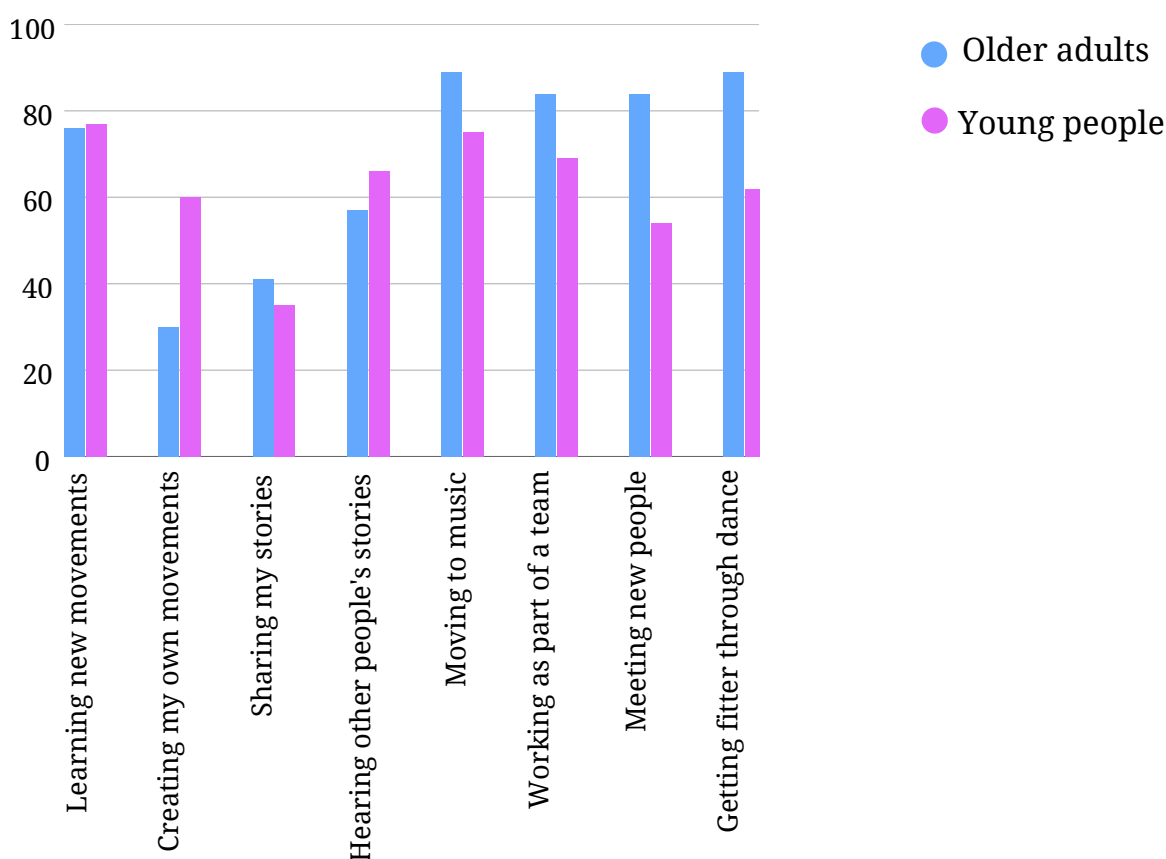
“I enjoyed breaking the mould and connecting with young people, we are normally so divided”

EXPERIENCES & BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT



The participants were overwhelmingly positive about the project and about dancing: “*It was great, I absolutely loved it!*” (young person). An older adult said: “*it was just like a dream come true*”.

In the survey, participants were asked to choose their preferred parts of the project from a tick-list (they could select as many as they liked). The chart below shows the percentage of responses for each element.



The most popular elements for the older adults were moving to music, getting fitter through dance, and meeting new people. The most popular elements among the young people were learning new movements, moving to music, and working as part of a team. As such, both artistic elements (moving to music) and social factors were important to both groups.

When asked to describe their favourite part of the project in their own words, participants reported four main categories, each of which contains several themes and has specific outcomes or benefits for participants. The categories described over the next four pages demonstrate the value and benefits of intergenerational dance activity.

SOCIAL ASPECTS

Meeting new people

“It made realise I need to go and talk and meet people” (older adult)

“Usually I get treated so differently with Rheumatoid Arthritis but I was treated as equal” (older adult)

Teamwork

“Working as a team and having fun” (young person)

“Working towards common goals” (older adult)

Meeting people from different generations

“My [older adult] partner was cool. She made me laugh” (young person)

“The young people were so friendly, I was surprised” (older adult)

“I loved working with the young people. The day was electrifying” (older adult)



Social aspects were highly valued by all participants and had clear benefits to their social and psychological wellbeing. The classes gave the older adults an opportunity to meet new people, work together, and socialise both during and after the sessions. For example, all of the older adult groups were given the opportunity to stay for a chat over tea and biscuits at the end of the class. The school children enjoyed performing together and creating choreography in small groups. Those that met an older adult group at the University of Wolverhampton additionally met the PE students, which may have raised their aspirations around future study in Higher Education.

The intergenerational aspect of the project added another layer to the social benefits, by breaking down barriers between generations, collaborating, supporting, and finding common ground with one another. Sharing stories was an important aspect of this. An older adult, whose story was used to create a dance by one of the school groups, reflected on how the process had “brought back some lovely memories, and made me feel special, that my story is important.” A sense of community was also created via the use of project-specific t-shirts which were worn during the joint workshops and the dance film, and were particularly well-received and worn with pride by the young people.

LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT

Developing skills

“It feels good achieving something” (older adult)

“I like improving my dance skills” (young person)

Learning exercises and routines

“I loved the steam train dance” (young person)

“I loved the carnival dancing!” (young person)



Learning about the Black Country

“Learning how the Black Country history is still important in 2026 and will be forever” (young person)

Improving health

“Excellent for arthritic joints, back problems, and general health” (older adult)

“It helped me move better, get up from chairs, climb steps better” (older adult)

Having the opportunity to learn new skills, improve, and achieve dance-related goals enabled participants to develop competencies, build self-confidence, and cultivate civic pride about the region through dance.

Learning and executing routines also had impacts on participants' health. The older adults in particular valued getting fitter through dance, with reported benefits of the project including greater muscle strength, enhanced energy, and reduced falls. The challenging movement material combined Postural Stability Instructor exercises with dance movement, to provide specific benefits for strength, flexibility and balance.

There were additional positive effects of taking part, as one older adult stated, “*I had the best night's sleep after.*” Older adults also reported cognitive benefits from having to learn and retain movement material: “*It's good for your brain.*”



ARTISTIC FACTORS

Dancing and having fun

“It’s so much fun...it’s liberating” (older adult)

Moving to music

“I love dancing to different music” (young person)

“Tori always seems to put the right music on” (older adult)

Performing

“Dancing in front of people” (young person)

“Seeing the children who are usually shy and lack confidence come out and be expressive” (school teacher)

Choreographing

“Creating my own movements” (young person)



Artistic factors inherent in the project enabled young people in particular to feel more confident, and to express themselves. Music was important for all participants. At times, Tori chose the music but there were instances where the young people had suggested music for the older adult classes and vice versa. This meant that during the joint workshops, Tori was able to provide a mix of tracks that all of the generations enjoyed. The impact of the music was evident during the observations, with participants joyfully nodding and singing along before beginning an exercise.

There were several mental health benefits apparent as a result of dancing, such as stress and anxiety reduction, and enhanced mood. One older adult explained how she could, *“just leave all the worries at home, shut the door and have an hour to yourself”*, while another said, *“When you’re dancing, you’re happy. It just makes me feel better.”*

Several young people noted how dance encouraged self-expression: *“it’s a way to express your feelings and communicate and express your energy.”* Another explained, *“I love that we can draw emotions in it.”*

Finally, Tori mirrored the school teacher’s comment about confidence among the young people: *“they didn’t have much confidence to stand up and answer a question or show their dance. But now they’re giving it 100%, and I couldn’t be prouder.”*



LEADERSHIP & TEACHING

Enthusiasm and inspiration

“Tori is such an inspiration to us all” (older adult)

“The enthusiasm and talent from Tori has brought out such teamwork from the class” (school teacher)



Inclusive approach

“Tori actually listens to my ideas” (young person)

“She always keeps an eye on everyone” (older adult)

“Seeing everyone included was a highlight” (PE student)

Tori’s unique teaching style energised the groups, enabling them to feel inspired and included. As one older adult explained, “*she gives you energy. She’s a delightful person who comes in and cheers us up. We look forward to it.*” Participants were highly motivated by Tori’s positive and engaging approach. Alongside this, she took the time to build rapport with participants, get to know them as individuals, differentiate exercises and activities (e.g. providing a choice of easier and more challenging versions of exercises for the older adults), and have high expectations of class members. During the observations, participants were highly engaged, with laughter frequently breaking out after intense periods of work and concentration. Tori noticed the participants’ unique skills and interests and tried to incorporate them, which helped to engender a sense of pride and confidence among participants.

When asked if there was anything they hadn’t enjoyed, most responses were to the contrary: for example, one young person wrote, “*Nothing, it was just the best experience.*” The few responses received for this question tended to be either:

1. Related to access among the older adults. For example, one older adult explained that she struggled to hear the young people, and another found using the stairs difficult as one venue was a listed building and lacked lift access. This suggests that finding out about access needs in advance could aid the smooth running of projects.

2. Contradictory responses from the young people. For instance, while 15 young people listed performing as their favourite part of the project, two of the young people had not enjoyed it. Where hard work and physical exertion was enjoyed by many children, eight mentioned not enjoying “being tired and sweaty”. Similarly, while 12 young people loved the music that was chosen, four participants did not enjoy it. This demonstrates the highly individualised preferences that are inherent in any group activity, and highlights the importance of involving participants where possible when making choices (e.g. music) or offering options (e.g. differentiation of material).



LOOKING FORWARD :

IDEAS AND MOTIVATION FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

97%
of participants
said they would
take part in a
similar project
in the future

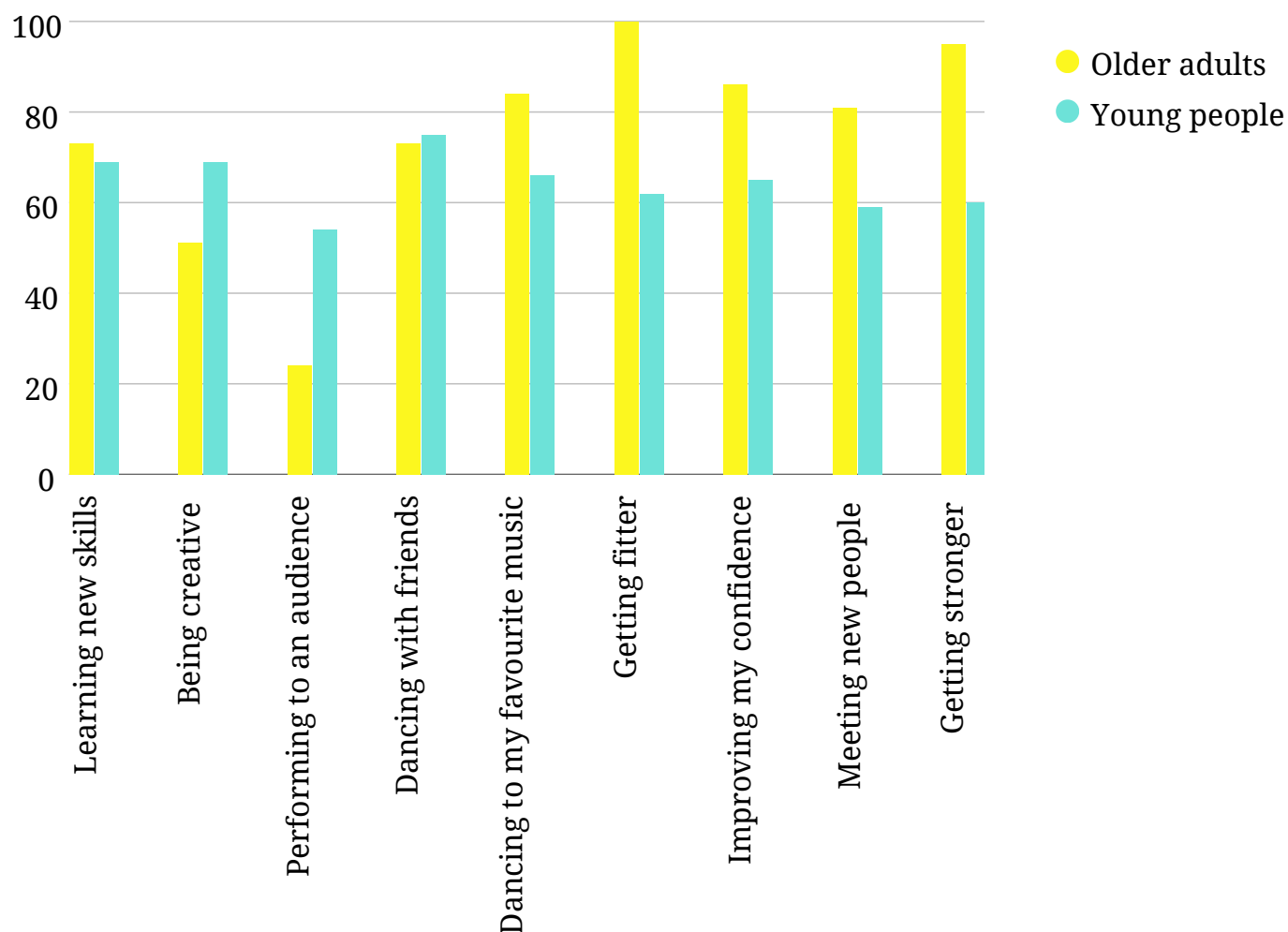
Given the participants' enthusiasm for the project, it is unsurprising that the vast majority wanted to continue dancing. It was also hoped that the project would encourage more dance activity in the area, and would inspire other artists to visit and create work.

Participants had few suggestions for how the sessions could be improved. In fact, many of the responses to this question centred around providing dance projects more often, or offering ones of longer duration. Several participants from both age groups noted that they would specifically like more intergenerational sessions. There were suggestions from young people to have more performances, more group work, opportunities for solos, and more variety in music such as *"trending music"*. Finally, one of the school teachers suggested *"bringing students from different schools together through dance"*, which would represent a further opportunity to build an artistic community in the region.

Around half of the participants had no previous formal dance experience. As such, Tori noted that more time was needed to build foundational skills among school children such as landing safely from jumps or performing in front of others. Alongside this, a teaching assistant would be helpful for all groups to help build such foundations and accelerate the learning.



Participants were given another tick-list of factors that would motivate them in future dance projects. The percentage of responses from the older adults and young people are shown in the chart below:



Getting fitter, stronger, and improving confidence were the most commonly reported factors that would motivate older adults to join a dance class or project in the future. Social elements such as meeting new people were also selected by the majority of participants. Interestingly, artistic factors such as being creative appeared to be less appealing to the older adults.

For young people, dancing with friends, learning new skills and being creative were chosen as the most motivating factors.

As such, social elements remained significant for both groups, although the scores for the other factors were somewhat different. Interestingly, performing to an audience was the least important factor for both groups. In fact, one older adult noted that she preferred the dance film to a live performance because it “felt less scary than a show.” Therefore, it is worth considering whether the role of performance in dance projects is sometimes over-estimated, and that social, artistic and fitness elements may be of more importance to participants across the generations.

SUMMARY

Move to be Moved addressed several barriers to dance activity in the Black Country, including a lack of opportunity, stereotypes about the region, and stereotypes about people from different age groups.

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the project, indicating that dance is a highly valued activity especially when people have had little to no previous access. Older adults and young people enjoyed a range of experiences within the project; artistic factors, opportunities to socialise and meet new people, and learning and developing skills were particularly important and had positive impacts on participants' mental, social, and physical health.

These outcomes were facilitated by both the ambitious project design, and its delivery by an experience and engaging dance artist. By demonstrating the artistic and creative potential that can be found in the Black Country, Move to be Moved provides encouragement and inspiration to those already living and working in the region, as well as to others seeking new opportunities in coldspot areas.



The findings from Move to be Moved were used to create a checklist (overleaf) to support dance artists who are interested in developing projects in coldspot areas. Although not definitive, it includes key learnings from the project which could be applied across other arts initiatives.

CREATIVITY IN COLDSPOTS CHECKLIST

1.. Have you considered the barriers to dance or arts activities in the area? How does your project address these specifically? Think about other potential barriers such as access needs and previous dance experience. Can you find out about these in advance to help you design your project?

☐

2. Which aspects of the area or region can be used as a creative stimulus? For example, it could be the landscape, architecture, or local history. How can this be used to foster civic pride among participants?

☐

3. How can the project be used to showcase the creativity and talent found in the area? Think about ways in which the project could attract interest from local and national organisations, funders, and dance artists. Can you partner with other local artists such as poets to increase the creative potential of the project?

☐

4. Reflect on the key motivating factors from Move to be Moved (e.g. social interaction, moving to music) when designing your project. Bear in mind that different age groups may have different motivations for participating

☐

5. Are there elements of co-design within your project? For instance, what are your participants' preferences in terms of dance genres and music styles to help engage them in initial sessions? Can you incorporate their experiences and stories when devising work?

☐

6. How else can you motivate participants during sessions? Think about using praise, differentiation, leadership opportunities and responsibilities (e.g. line leader; making tea), as well as finding out about and incorporating elements of personal preferences where possible (this can range from favourite TV shows to sharing aspects of participants' sociocultural backgrounds)

☐

7. Can the project provide opportunities to bring together different groups from the local community who wouldn't normally meet? How can the project break down barriers and reduce stereotypes? Explore other ways to enhance community and group cohesion such as offering project t-shirts

☐

8. Confidence-building may be important if participants have little prior dance experience. Model and encourage positive self-talk, get to know participants as individuals, create opportunities for team-work and small performances. Have high expectations of your participants: build pride in each other's skills, progress and achievements!

☐

9. Have you considered multiple ways that the project can be disseminated? Participants in coldspots may not have performed before so are there alternative, lower pressure ways to do this such as via a dance film? Also remind participants that there are other ways to 'perform' – travelling across the space in a dance class, or walking with your head held up high when out and about, can be a performance!

☐

10. Think about the legacy and sustainability of the project. For example, can you work with local students and teachers to offer training on delivering dance within the PE curriculum?

☐

REFERENCES

1. Campbell, F., Whear, R., Rogers, M., Sutton, A., Barlow, J., Booth, A., ... & Thompson-Coon, J. (2024). What is the effect of intergenerational activities on the wellbeing and mental health of children and young people? A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 20(3), cl2-1429.
2. Whear, R., Campbell, F., Rogers, M., Sutton, A., Robinson-Carter, E., Sharpe, R., ... & Thompson-Coon, J. (2023). What is the effect of intergenerational activities on the wellbeing and mental health of older people?: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 19(4), cl2-1355.
3. O'Reilly, S., Ní Bhriain, O., Dillon, S., & Clifford, A. M. (2024). A comprehensive scoping review of intergenerational dance programmes for cohorts with a generational gap. *Plos One*, 19(12), e0311564.
4. Atkins, R., Deatrack, J. A., Bowman, C., Bolick, A., McCurry, I., & Lipman, T. H. (2018). University–community partnerships using a participatory action research model to evaluate the impact of dance for health. *Behavioral Sciences*, 8(12), 113.
5. Beth Johnson Foundation (2011). *A Guide to Intergenerational Practice*. Stoke-on-Trent: Beth Johnson Foundation.
6. Anderson, S., Fast, J., Keating, N., Eales, J., Chivers, S., & Barnet, D. (2017). Translating knowledge: Promoting health through intergenerational community arts programming. *Health Promotion Practice*, 18(1), 15-25.
7. Douse, L., Farrer, R., & Aujla, I. (2020). The impact of an intergenerational dance project on older adults' social and emotional well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 561126.
8. Jenkins, L. K., Farrer, R., & Aujla, I. J. (2021). Understanding the impact of an intergenerational arts and health project: A study into the psychological well-being of participants, carers and artists. *Public Health*, 194, 121-126.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the school and community groups who took part and made this project possible.

Photos of participants in white T-shirts by mhfilmandmedia.
All other photos by Romy Whai.