



Interactive Family Dance Evaluation Report

The focus of this report is to explore the outcomes relating to a dance project aimed at children under 5 years of age and their families. Numerous research projects in dance and health have sought to explain the physical health benefits of dance for children and young people over the last decade, and it is now widely accepted that creative dance can offer health outcomes which can tackle childhood obesity and support the positive development of psychological outcomes such as self esteem and body confidence. Our participation in physical activity is also closely associated to the social connections we build with others.

The focus of this project has been to examine the social impacts of creative dance for children under the age of 5 years with their close and extended families and build evidence for the continued provision of this activity not only for the positive health outcomes that we know dance delivers, but for the social inclusion benefits which are vital for healthy, sustainable lives particularly in the early years.

Dance Network Association CIC
c/o The Mercury Theatre, Balmerne Gate, Colchester, CO1 1PT



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Project Management: Gemma Wright, Artistic Director
For further information about this project please contact Gemma at gemma@dancenetworkassociation.org.uk

Delivery Artist: Emma Meek, Dance Development Artist, The Dance Network Association

Images by Emma Meek.

Venue: The Gibberd Gallery, Harlow. Huge thanks to the staff there for offering space for the completion of this project.

Evaluation Lead: Elsa Urmston
Data collection and Analysis: Elsa Urmston. Thanks to Emma and her assistants for the collection of data during the project.

For further information about the evaluation of this project, please contact Elsa at elsa.urmston@gmail.com

The Context of Social Isolation and Loneliness and How Dance Can Help

Social isolation is defined as the ‘inadequate quality and quantity of social relations with other people at the different levels where human interaction takes place’ (Public Health England, 2015, p. 8). It is a determinant of health that the Government is seeking to address between 2016 and 2019 within the Public Health Outcomes Framework (Domain 1.18; DH, 2016). Evidence suggests that social isolation is present throughout the lifecourse and affects not just daily relationships with close family, but can cascade to our interactions with our wider communities and larger social environment (The Marmot Review, 2010). The literature also connects social isolation with loneliness (Griffiths, 2016) – a distressing, subjective emotional state, which can occur regardless of the social structures a person experiences.

The opportunity to relate and socialize with others is important throughout our lives. Healthy relationships with others improve physiological health and psychological wellbeing (Yang et al, 2016), positively affect healthful behaviours such as healthy eating and physical activity (Bailey, 2005) and reduce the risk of morbidity (Holt-Lunstad, Smith and Layton, 2010) and mortality (The Marmot Review, 2010). Much recent research has focused on our aging population in the UK and the increasing social isolation and loneliness they experience. In turn, this places our services under increasing pressure to treat the effects of isolation. The Marmot Review reports that those who are socially isolated and feel lonely are 1.8 times more likely to visit their GP, 1.6 times more likely to visit A+E and 3.5 times more likely to enter local authority funded residential care (2010).

Yet social isolation and feelings of loneliness are also prevalent in young families, especially where expectant and new mothers lack a socially supportive environment (Barlow and Coe, 2012). Without meaningful social interactions beyond the immediate family group, mothers are more likely to experience poor mental health. Research examples suggest that chronic maternal depression can impact early childhood development and has the potential to affect the child’s mental health as they mature (Apter et al, 2013). Individual factors such as age, gender, income and ethnicity all have a part to play in one’s sense of social inclusion; these are augmented, or compounded by community factors (access to and availability of services) and societal factors (economic and political climate) too. Social isolation is exacerbated by lower economic status and poor education opportunities (Fokkema, De Jong Gierveld, and Dykstra, 2012), thus geographical location, access, economic status and education are part of a wider picture around social isolation

as well. This provision is therefore particularly vital amongst communities where inequalities exist – targeting early years work towards communities located in areas of economic, health and access deprivation is pertinent. The aim of this project has been to tackle social isolation through prevention, rather than treatment, by offering a service that allows children and their families to connect to one another.

Lack of social connection has been shown to slow down children’s physical and cognitive development (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2016) and thus, much clinical and cultural practice in the UK now points to the importance of opportunities for families to socially connect between themselves and with others. Two important strands of this work are emphasized in the early years development literature; that of play, and touch. ‘Play is essential to development [and] is recognized as a right of every child’ (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 182). At different stages of development, play enables the child to understand and relate to the world and to others, moving through developmental stages of dissociated play alongside other children and adults, to pretend play, collaborating with others to create imaginary worlds. Through our playful encounters we socially interact with others at different levels, with people we know well and those who are new to us. Vygotsky coined the notion of social learning, beginning with social contacts and exchanges between people as the basis for learning and ongoing interactions; the child starts to learn cooperatively and will eventually practise these skills alone as they develop (1962). Sherbourne (2001) explains the importance of building different relationships through developmental play with children and young people, termed ‘relationship play’ (p. 5). Importantly, through such playful encounters with adults and other children, body awareness is developed and physical and emotional security can be nurtured. In turn the child gains confidence from the way they are supported; ‘the child finds it safe to commit and trust’ (p. 3). The process of relationship play enables a range of modes of communication including verbally, through eye contact and developing physical literacy – all are important factors in successful transition into school life at Reception age. In the case of the Interactive Families Project, we sought to draw on Sherbourne’s principles of relationship play, mostly between primary carer and child, but also where appropriate between children and in relation to other adults. Thus, opportunities to interact and meet new people early in life can contribute to normal physical and cognitive learning through a social learning model.

‘Fostering the ability to interact positively with other people, to share, co-operate and work together, is perhaps one of [our] most important tasks’ (Van Papendorp and Friedman, 1997, p. 107). Dance is well placed to support the development of healthy and positive relationships amongst children and young people, and indeed their families. It can foster a sense of a learning community, drawn together by a common enjoyment of dance and movement, but in which the social relationships formed through dancing together are also a key factor. In this regard, dance is often seen as a means to strengthen identity and therefore enable social cohesion across the life course. Dance opportunities for early years children and their families supports social development through its non-verbal nature which ‘paves the way for experiences in socialisation that are not limited by language’ (Van Papendorp and Friedman, p. 107), or indeed where language has not yet developed. Common community dance practice encourages children to engage in movement games and playful exchanges with their peers, families and other adults, as well as learning movement phrases which develop their physical literacy and motor skill development (Greenland, 2000).

A particular skill developed through dance of controlled physical contact with others is the use of touch, where body parts connect and share weight. This requires ‘trust, sensitivity and physical respect’ (Paine and NDTA, 2014, p. 33) and a growing awareness of oneself in relation to others. Thus, touch is an equally important process of a child’s development and sense of belonging as it regulates perceptions and emotions (Kisilevsky et al, 1991). The experiences of early interpersonal touch are also associated with positive self-esteem, life satisfaction and social competence later in life (Jones and Brown, 1996). In the early years, Lamont (in Pasch, 2017) suggests that children should spend 50% of their time in the arms of their parents and 50% of their time on their tummies exploring the world with adults’ careful attention and support. Not only does parent-child interpersonal touch have long-lasting impacts on children’s physical and psychological development, but developmental patterns are enabled and children’s ‘bodyfulness’ is realized (Pasch, 2017, p. 6).^{*} Importantly, the social bonds that children make are reinforced by physical understanding, thus, potentially contributing to the reduction of social isolation for them and, by default, their supporting adults.

^{*} There are numerous academic texts which outline the universal developmental milestones of babies and children which support normal progression through childhood. It is not the scope of this report to outline them here, although play and touch are considered as key features in dance practice with early years’ participants and their families.



Movement play

Aims of Dance Network Association Early Years Provision

With this theoretical background, the aims of the organisation's early years provision across the county are to:

- To advise, support and educate young children aged 0-5 years of age and their families about dance and the role it can play in tackling childhood obesity, loneliness and social isolation
- To create an environment for families to come together and make friends
- To contribute to the creation of happier lives through physical activity which will help to improve health
- To aid the development of children's motor skills and cognition ready for school
- To increase confidence and reduce social isolation

Interactive Family Dance in Harlow

Project Objectives

The Interactive Family Dance project in Harlow drew on the overall aims of the early years programmes run by Dance Network Association across Essex, but also specifically these objectives were a focus:

- To promote the relationship and support between each family and child unit, whilst offering them the opportunity to socialise with other people outside the family group whilst dancing and sharing refreshments.
- To offer a safe playful environment for parents and children to feel comfortable to explore movement, play and creativity between themselves and with others.
- To create new relationships with other children and their adults, and visiting public to the gallery.
- To offer children and their families a sense of self-realisation in their growing skills and knowledge of movement, dance and of themselves.
- To highlight the value of children's movement through sharing, experimentation and celebration.
- To support children to feel their bodies in space and generate a sense of self in relation to others.
- To introduce exercises that contribute to learning and growing such as tummy time, eye tracking and crawling.
- To enable parents with younger children to find their own ways of moving, exploring and developing.
- To share and workshop ideas which families can continue to explore in their own homes.
- To offer a fun, happy space to laugh and connect with others.

Descriptive Data of Participants

Attendance

The first two weeks of the project were compromised due to the fast turnaround from planning to delivery. This period of time was at the end of the Spring term before the school holidays and Easter period. There was zero attendance at these two sessions. It is probable that attendance in the first week was poor due to the speed at which the project was set up with the venue, marketing materials being distributed and the first session beginning. The second week had been

planned with the Gallery, although there was no space available and hence that session had to be cancelled. It was in fact Good Friday, so more likely that participants would not attend on a Bank Holiday. By week three attendance picked up and there was a common core of participants across the eight weeks of approximately 5 key family groups. Other participants came and went during the programme, as is often the nature of working with families and early years' groups. It's vital that projects have sufficient lead-in time before beginning with participants to ensure appropriate marketing and communications have been finalised. Yet it is not atypical that projects such as the Interactive Families Dance bottleneck in terms of time management, particularly when accounting for recruitment of participants and the logistics of working in partnership with other organisations. Changes in funding structures may mean that funding is released even closer to project delivery deadlines and partners in any project of this nature need to remain resilient in the face of this. In the case of this project, it can help to more closely target the appropriate communities to the provision, either through taster sessions in different localities, or more targeted marketing activities such as social media advertising and flyer distribution in specific geographical locations. It may also be useful to consider commencing activity at the start of school terms, particularly for families with more than one child who might be more restricted by school holiday periods and the wider demands of the family group.

Descriptive Statistics

Despite the challenging start for the project, a range of families and children across the early years age range were reached through this project.



Babes-in-arms and early years participants with their carers

Description	Data
Total Children Reached	15 children (11 family groups; 4 families with 2 siblings)
Age Range	3 months to 6 years 1 month Mean age: 23.06 months (1 year, 11 months); <i>SD 19.24 (1 year, 7 months)</i>
Gender: Children	9 female; 6 male
Gender: Parents and Caregivers	15 female However, additional family members would also attend and watch and included female grandparents and a father on one occasion
Disability: Children	1
Disability: Parents and Caregivers	0
Ethnicity: Children	White British: 13 Mixed/ Multiple: 2
Ethnicity: Parents and Caregivers	White British: 12 White Other: 2 Mixed/ Multiple: 1

Other Family-based Exercise Patterns

Families were asked what other physical activity they engaged in with their children. Nine children participated in no other physical activity apart from the dance sessions as part of the Interactive Family Dance project. Six children did other activities such as Park Run, swimming, cycling, music classes and rugby for toddlers. In informal discussions with families about their engagement with activities outside those provided by this project, parents explained the importance of activity in the vicinity of their homes, because plans change so frequently with young children. For them, services that are drop-in and conveniently located near home, or where they need to go and complete other tasks such as the weekly shop, are more likely to be used. For others, physical activity is not a regular part of their lifestyle; thus by attending the Interactive Family Dance sessions, it could be suggested that over half of these families are keen to engage in activities which have a physical nature to them but that also allow them to spend quality time with their child, despite not normally participating in physical activity. Access, awareness and availability are critical in ensuring that family groups can reach these opportunities.

The theoretical constructs which dominate the literature with regard to enabling social inclusion and reducing perceptions of isolation and loneliness are informed by understanding participants' access to services, both in terms of financial and location implications, but also in terms of what they know about the service they are accessing and how it might add to their skills, knowledge and

understanding. These principles guide the evaluation of the project in terms of its set up, as well as content and modes of delivery.

Access

The Interactive Family Dance project was located in The Gibberd Gallery in the Civic Centre in Harlow. The Gallery provided space for the sessions in kind and the Gallery's location is central to local shopping, parking and other amenities. It was considered ideal in reaching families already in the town centre and provided a clean, large space for dance, movement and play to occur. Nevertheless, in terms of targeting areas of multiple deprivation which may house families unable to access this kind of provision due to transport, education or economic circumstances, and therefore be at greater risk of social isolation, it may be prudent to locate future projects of this nature amongst the communities it aims to serve. It is likely that those not engaged in physical activity are more likely to attend in their locality than somewhere unfamiliar to them. Despite the Gallery's centralised location, it might be argued that a Gallery space is not somewhere that members of these communities readily attend (many project participants explained that they hadn't visited the Gallery prior to this project). Whilst it is positive that the Gallery received new visitors to their venue, that was not the primary aim of this project; locating projects of this nature amongst the communities it wishes to serve, may translate to a more meaningful reach to new participants, and more regular attendance throughout the course of the project.



The Gibberd Gallery

Harlow Town is an area which has pockets of deprivation and is described as the second most deprived town in Essex (Harlow Council, 2010). Participants were drawn from across numerous wards in and around Harlow. Analysis of participants' postcodes reveals that families came from different geographical locations. In analyzing these in relation to the indices of multiple deprivation, participants came from a large geographical area including Uttlesford (some 22 miles to the north of Harlow) and East Hertfordshire, as well as local wards such as Old Harlow, Toddbrook, Mark Hall and Sumners & Kingsmoor. Analysis of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation reveal that approximately 25% of participants live in wards described as being in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in England. Whilst economic deprivation is one indicator to consider in planning the location of these kinds of projects to reach the most needy in our society, the deprivation that rural families can experience because of lack of access to services in their local area and the need to travel, sometimes large distances, to find activities for children and their carers to participate in, can lead to social isolation as well. It becomes ever more important then, to consider placing numerous projects in areas where access may be problematic because of financial and/ or geographical hardships.

Developing Social Relationships

A clear focus of the dance sessions was to create a play-based learning environment in which children and their families could foster new social relationships, amongst themselves but also with other new children and adults. The artist enabled cohesion amongst group participants by employing an encouraging, positive and welcoming environment for them to explore. In her reflective notes, the artist emphasizes the importance she placed on smiling and welcoming families at the start of the session, and ensuring her active involvement with all the tasks she facilitated, whilst noticing the progression of the children and families in their assimilation of new skills and finding opportunities to celebrate those milestones, no matter how small. This brought about trust within the group, of the group leader; 'whilst sometimes we didn't know what was coming next, there was a sense that Emma [artist] really knew what she was doing and why, and so you just go with it' (mother). The trust was visible between the artist and the children themselves as their confidence and familiarity with her and the movement ideas grew. Children would more and more readily leave their parents to stand with the artist and her assistant, responding to questions and engaging with the activity. It is clear that the social relationship between the children and the artist was consolidated through repeated activity from week to week, which was gently scaffolded to increase complexity, but provided a familiar and safe

framework from which to develop. An example of this is starting each session with the 'pizza massage'. The child's carer offers the child a massage, using the analogy of a pizza, 'kneading and shaping the dough, adding the sauce, sprinkling the cheese and topping and cutting it into slices' (artist). The final session saw the children giving their adults the massage, adopting a reciprocal giving and receiving of touch – the pleasure from both parent and child is something that families commented on in their discussions about the value of the programme. 'To give your child a simple touch and have that given back with such enthusiasm was so nice... it doesn't happen in the day to day of our lives' (mother).

Social cohesion was enabled in a number of other ways too:

- *Use of props such as feathers and elastic.* Feathers have unpredictable movement patterns when blown or moved by people's movement in the space. They would land on other people, and unintentional interactions especially between the children would come about. Adults worked with children other than their own, and because of the delicate nature of the feathers' movement, this brought about a light, calm movement quality in the participants too, and time to notice one another's reactions to the movement of the feathers.

The elastic stretched round the whole group in a circle, using a rhyme to take it up high and down low and from side to side. This required collaboration between all involved to move the elastic harmoniously; this heightened when the children moved over and under the elastic and the adults had to work together to maintain the circle formation, change its direction and movement quality. This activity meant that eye contact was necessary between adults in order to communicate together as a team, which brought about new connections amongst them through their chatter and laughter, aside from their children's activity. Thus a growing inter- and independence between child and adult was facilitated.



Feather play

- *Moving through the space* enabled all participants to meet others through smiling, shaking hands, pulling faces, touching tummies and touching noses. Through touch, physical connections were fostered between participants without needing to discuss. Participants moved freely through the space, in ways that they wanted to move, perhaps to the musical accompaniment, sometimes in relation to others in the space, or completely alone; this freedom to move in the way that participants wanted to move created an environment of acceptance of difference and individuality.
- *Circle formations* were returned to again and again throughout the session and all sessions started and ended in a seated circle. This is a well-used tool within community dance practice as everyone is equal and can relate to each other visually or aurally or through touch.
- *Turn-taking* was often used across various tasks. During a body surfing activity, participants swapped between roles as the surfer and as the roller. Whilst not all children waited in turn, the principles of everyone having a go, and sharing an experience were emphasized. The same occurred with the rolling of the dice to determine which animal would inspire their movement imagination in an improvisation game. Each child was able to roll the dice and talk about the animal that would inspire their movement choice; they demonstrated the movement and made the sounds of the animal and others copied or did their own version. This respect of others' movement choices and celebrating of difference in how activities might be carried out created a non-judgmental environment in which trust was a key factor in building social cohesion throughout the group. Parents remarked that the freedom given of their child to respond in any way they wanted was a really positive component of the sessions – there was no right or wrong way to do things.



Turn-taking

- *Post-session Snacks and Social Time*

Each session ended with some time for healthy snacks and drinks for both children and their adults. The snack time acted as a catalyst for chats amongst the group and further reiterated the 'sharing'-based nature of the sessions, as children ate and drank together. The aim of the project was not to provide nutritional information for families, yet this is a clear direction for the project's development. This would need to involve working in partnership with paediatric dietitians to offer support and advice for families, alongside the physical activity provision that Dance Network Association can offer.

Physical and Cognitive Development

Whilst social cohesion has been the main focus of this enquiry, activities that supported physical and cognitive development were the primary focus of the content of the sessions. Research suggests that dance and movement can support the health and wellbeing of those participating, and support feelings of relatedness and belonging when part of a group of this nature. It is not only the nature of how these activities are facilitated that is important, but indeed the growing physical and social confidence that children and adults assimilate from their participation that can contribute to social integration as well.



Child, baby and artist playing

The following table outlines the content of a typical session and some of the physical and cognitive development outcomes:

Content	Sample Physical and Cognitive Development Outcomes
Hello and Welcome Covering eyes and Waving hello Clap, wiggle and do a movement saying your name	Growing awareness of constancy of people and things Supports trunk control and stability for those aged 6 months plus approx Development of imaginary thinking and copying Turn-taking Supports fine motor skills in fingers Development of the mature S curve of the spine
Pizza Massage	Enhances posture and coordination Develops responsiveness to touch and pleasure Development of imaginary thinking and copying Supports fine motor skills in fingers
Pitter, patter raindrops rhyme and actions Alone With partner	Helps the hands to open from grasp Cause and effect of sound and action Working with the rest of the group in unison and alone Sensations of giving and receiving touch with others
Reaching high and low Floor games – spinning on tummy; spider fingers reaching and crawling; locomoting around the space – crawling	Moving through movement patterns such as upper and lower quadrants (homologous); using limbs on the same side (homolateral); using limbs on opposite sides of the body (contralateral); understanding length of body (head to toes) Promotes cervical and lumbar stability and neck strength Enhances posture and coordination Helps heel to coccyx alignment
I hear thunder rhyme and actions Fingers and toes	Supports fine motor skills in hands and feet Stabilises the hip sockets Kicking movements help children know their own length
Moving around the space – crawl; shuffle; balance; big steps; little steps Meeting others – shaking hands; touching tummies; touching noses	Development of locomotion, using different body parts to move through the space Balance away from the floor Promotes and supplies the brain with information regarding the body's position in space Reaching an object and understanding cause and effect Sensations of giving and receiving touch with others Helps the development of the mature S curve of the spine
Elastic rhyme and actions Bubbles	Stimulates horizontal eye tracking by using the muscles to pull eyes into correct alignment Helps hands open from grasp Following instructions and the results of that Large group cooperation
Covering eyes and waving goodbye	Growing awareness of constancy of people and things Supports trunk control and stability for those aged 6 months plus approx Development of imaginary thinking and copying Turn-taking Supports fine motor skills in fingers Development of the mature S curve of the spine

Developments in Physical and Social Confidence

Families were observed for the duration of the project to evaluate the progression of physical and cognitive development in relation to the activities that were part of the sessions. Jayne* was 2 years 5 months old at the end of the project. Her first attendance was in week 4. She attended all other sessions to week 10 and came each week with her mother. Both mother and child were observed to be quite quiet and shy; and this largely continued throughout the project in terms of their social interaction with others particularly during the snack time after the session. Nevertheless, significant changes were observed in Jayne's physical confidence as she progressed through the programme and these were reiterated by the parent and the artist in conversation. At first, Jayne was quiet and her facial reactions were difficult for the artist to read, yet progressively through each session, she became more animated especially with her mother.

In following weeks, Jayne would start each session quietly and with some trepidation but once activities were familiar, her verbal and physical confidence would progress – she counted with the artist and was especially enthusiastic verbally and physically towards the end of the programme when counting with sticks, banging vigorously on the floor, following instructions very closely and performing tasks accurately with little guidance from mum or the artist. Above all the artist noticed her increasing observation skills. Whilst Jayne was often shy, she would watch carefully and respond appropriately to tasks set. In scaling Jayne's involvement in activities using The Leuven Scales of Wellbeing and Involvement (1994), the artist progressively marked her over the weeks starting at 3 on a 5 point scale, and increasing to 4 and 5 in the final two weeks. Her activity shifted from continuous with intense moments of involvement, in which Jayne was involved in completing a task, and even if distracted she would return to the activity, towards more sustained intense involvement, concentrating, persisting with activities, using her energy to complete tasks and finding creative solutions to the activities available. The mother's relationship in this was key. At times she would appear distant and less engaged with her daughter, yet analyzing her behaviour more closely, she would observe, support and encourage Jayne to become independent, make mistakes, not worry about these and move on in the activity. This approach, combined with the repeated activities of the session seemed key in supporting her growing physical confidence in the dance setting. In later discussions, the mother remarked that,

‘she has grown in her physical development, more confident definitely. We did the body surfing today, and she was happy to do it without me there, roll on someone else...

* Jayne's name has been changed to maintain anonymity

[laughter] that's a new thing and something that doesn't happen at home! But she got on and did it' (mother).

The mother also explained that Jayne's willingness to be on her tummy and play on the floor was better; she had a growing confidence to stay lying down, even though sometimes that was hard work physically. The mother saw changes in her social confidence with other adults and children explaining that she was sharing more within the session and critically in the snack time after the class. It is unlikely that this developmental milestone was as a direct result of the project itself, but certainly it is possible that the workshop/ snack structure with parents nearby, gently supporting successes and failures contributes to the child's increasing social interactions.

Importantly, Jayne would talk about her dancing outside of the sessions to others, and would be eager to return week to week. Her mother reported that Jayne would talk about her friends at dancing, often doing activities from the classes at home too. The physical and cognitive developments observed by both artist and parent suggests a growing confidence in this child, borne out of the opportunity to dance in a context which centralises physical and cognitive developmental patterning within an environment which promotes playful exploration where the individual and their learning frustrations are accommodated. As Pasch (2017, p. 6) suggests offering support and attentiveness especially when children become increasingly frustrated within a physically developmental framework appears to be connected to the mid-brain, where one 'builds a bridge between oneself and the world and making relationships'.



Centralising play with support and attentiveness

Conclusions

The aims of the Dance Network Association's early years provision have largely been met through the Interactive Families Dance project in Harlow. A total of 15 families were encountered, widening awareness of dance and its role in healthful behaviours. There are of course developments to the organisation's provision that would be beneficial, such as **better targeting the work in localities where young families might be at risk of social isolation and loneliness due to their financial or geographical circumstances**. Working with other partners to ensure a joined up provision which can tackle increasing physical activity and offering expert nutritional advice would create a project which may well appeal to a wider constituency. It could better tackle both the physical activity and nutrition aspects of reducing child excess weight in future projects.

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that **these sessions provided an environment for families to come together and make new friendships**; indeed the project enabled existing friendships to be cemented further as friends brought friends to the classes. The case study of Jayne suggests her increasing happiness in dancing which brought about shifts in her confidence and sense of self. She dances in another dance school too and according to her mother is 'always dancing, she loves it'. The work in the Interactive Families Dance project has fuelled her love of moving and hopefully will inspire her and her mother to maintain physical movement in their lives, both at home and in existing dance provision. **Her developing physical literacy and social confidence evidences processes which will ensure she will be ready for school in two years time.**

By drawing on established dance practice models from Pasch, Sherbourne and others, we have been able to carefully demonstrate that **this work positively impacts the physical and cognitive developmental benefits of our activity for early years participants**, and continue to reflect on that practice to ensure its currency and relevance for family populations across Essex. There is scope to develop **a toolkit for best practice for work with early years participants and their adults**, offering training for early years' practitioners and finding ways to work in partnership with other providers to ensure more families can reach this kind of offer.

The evidence of this project suggests that **dance can bring together groups of people of different ages and different abilities to connect and interact with other people**. Some participants may be quite isolated from services due to geographical location, there may be a paucity of dance provision in their area, or indeed they may be isolated because of the health conditions that they

face. Some outputs from this project suggest that **dance has the ability to transcend such challenges and bring people together to feel emotionally, physically and mentally connected.** The artist has a significant role to play in this as they have the potential to interact and strongly influence the notions of social connectedness; in engaging with dance, participants' confidence in moving and interacting can grow, one's sense of connectedness may feel more rooted and so overall health and wellbeing can flourish too. Community dance practice lends itself strongly to the principles of social connectedness as suggested by People Dancing (2013):

Community dance is not confined to any specific type of dance and is concerned with engaging people creatively and safely in a dance style, or exploring dance ideas and forms of their own. It can involve creating dance for performance, and is centrally concerned with the experience of dancing and the process of making dance, and includes many ways of 'participating' - learning, making, performing, watching and talking about dance.

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