



Learning Notes explore findings from a phase of the study and their implications for action during the project. These were captured in two stages: Learning Note 2 covers summer 2021 – spring 2023 and offers important detail on impacts of the project

# Learning Note 2

Resi/Dance Research Study

Marsaili Cameron, Dr Sheila Marsh, Dr  
Louise McDowall

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# Learning Note 2: Resi/Dance research study 2021- 2023



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## 1. Introduction

This note captures:

- what [action](#) was taken by the study from May 2021 – April 2023
- [what we found](#) in relation to what the Resi/Dance project achieved from summer 2021 – spring 2023
- What themes and shared [learning](#) emerged from this for DUY and for wider audiences.

We summarise and analyse key issues rather than offering long descriptions of activity and material gathered. We use images to show the learning being tracked, both to help people involved in the project and for wider audiences in the arts and community development.

### Looking back to Learning Note 1

The original, over-arching aim was expressed in Learning Note 1 (LN1) as a question which remains relevant:

- **What knowledge can we add for ourselves and others that will enable us to deepen and widen the impact of our work with individuals, families, and communities?**

As of 2023, the study offers rich layers of data and insights that can be used to provide tentative answers to this question. But there are as many answers as there are potential audiences with different perspectives, interests, and priorities. For example, as well as DUY, there are wider audiences in arts and community development, such as funders/ commissioners, other arts providers, statutory and voluntary agencies, and local community organisations. And, as funders increasingly require robust evidence of arts organisations' ability to reach a range of very different audiences across the country, mainstream arts organisations are likely to want to develop a yet deeper understanding of how the so-called 'elite' and the 'community' can co-exist creatively and constructively. The project should consider new directions at the Arts Council and in Bradford's City of Culture work.

### Who is this second Learning Note for?

DUY itself comes first, of course. Initial answers to the question, 'How can this research/evaluation be used to benefit DUY?', might include to:

- ground bids for funding in a rich evidence base
- be mined for insights to support the recruitment, training and management of staff
- underpin the development of strategic and marketing goals
- improve communications within and outside the company
- To burnish DUY's reputation as an 'expert witness' in relation to professional practice regarding dance and community engagement.
- To make the case for the value of DUY's approaches and methods

Much of this note focuses on the organisational impacts of the project on DUY; and these have been discussed with personnel at DUY to help create insights and develop future action. But the note also shows how community-based dance work can have far-reaching, and deeply appreciated, impacts on participants and their families. The associated learning is likely to be useful to other organisations working locally.

## What happened next?

The DUY programme continued to develop, with a post-Covid flowering involving intensive projects, school activities, a project for boys as well as Resi/Dance weekly sessions. The embedded researcher, Dr Louise McDowall, worked with the project, both participants and staff over the period 2021-2023, focusing on targeted observation of the project activities, and on in-depth interviews with those involved. The study focused on Resi/Dance through cycles of observation, interviews, discussion and analysis developed in the research team informed by the vital insights afforded by the embedded researcher. A particular challenge was posed to research methods by working with a small number of respondents in a small geographical area where everyone knows everyone and with a very small staff team. This brought challenges of confidentiality in reporting on findings.

## Action research in a changing landscape<sup>i</sup>

LN1 described how the research/evaluation was designed to contribute to on-going learning, charting cycles of inquiry and critical reflection closely linked in real time with the rolling-out of the Resi/Dance programme. The questions at the heart of the inquiry remain:

- What is it about Resi/Dance that might produce change of the kind people want?
- How do the mechanisms for change triggered by the programme counteract existing social processes?

During Phases Two and Three of the study, a further question increasingly made itself felt:

- How can the programme identify and draw on **positive** elements of existing social processes?<sup>ii</sup>

The nature of Resi/Dance means there is no real 'baseline' because the whole process has been unique. Nonetheless research can be conducted with rigour to provide soundly based and valuable insights. The team used the *dedoose* online research platform in this phase to ensure the mass of qualitative material could be robustly analysed. Currently 34 phase 2 transcripts have been analysed through 1080 interview excerpts using 109 themes/subthemes. The analysis has also involved regular meetings of the team that mine the on-the-ground experience of the project's embedded researcher and provide her with vital reflective space. Our notes of these sessions represent additional important research material that has supported the analytic phase. For full details of the research approach, rationale and methodology, see separate paper '*How we approached the research study and why*'.

## 2. Holme Wood: underlying patterns of resilience and mutual care

As the dance practitioners became familiar and trusted figures in the Holme Wood community, and as local partnerships with other agencies began to mature, underlying patterns of resilience and mutual care could be seen more clearly. The community has a formidable (and partially deserved) reputation for anti-social behaviour; but the research shows that this blanket stigmatisation serves to obscure many enduring and reciprocal relationships among residents, living in multi-layered communities, along with their determination to seize opportunities that will benefit family members in the short and longer term. As, over time, relationships deepened between dance practitioners and the community, it became possible for sensitive and challenging issues to be broached. In often

extremely challenging circumstances, what could fairly be expected from the dance artists, and what from participants and their families? The answers could never be simple, as assumptions to do with respect, trust and professionalism were involved. But it was a mark of success for the project that views could be openly shared.

The landscape in which the research – and the programme itself – are being carried out has been marked by sudden changes, appearances, disappearances. Lockdown and other constraints linked with the Covid pandemic scuppered attempts to be consistent for any length of time. And changes of personnel within the project have raised questions about some of the key variables that underpinned the ‘theory of change’ outlined in LN1:

*‘Applying DUY practice – i.e. a professional dance approach with consistent participant & family support over time demonstrates trust and builds capacity of participants. Performance cements transformation.’*

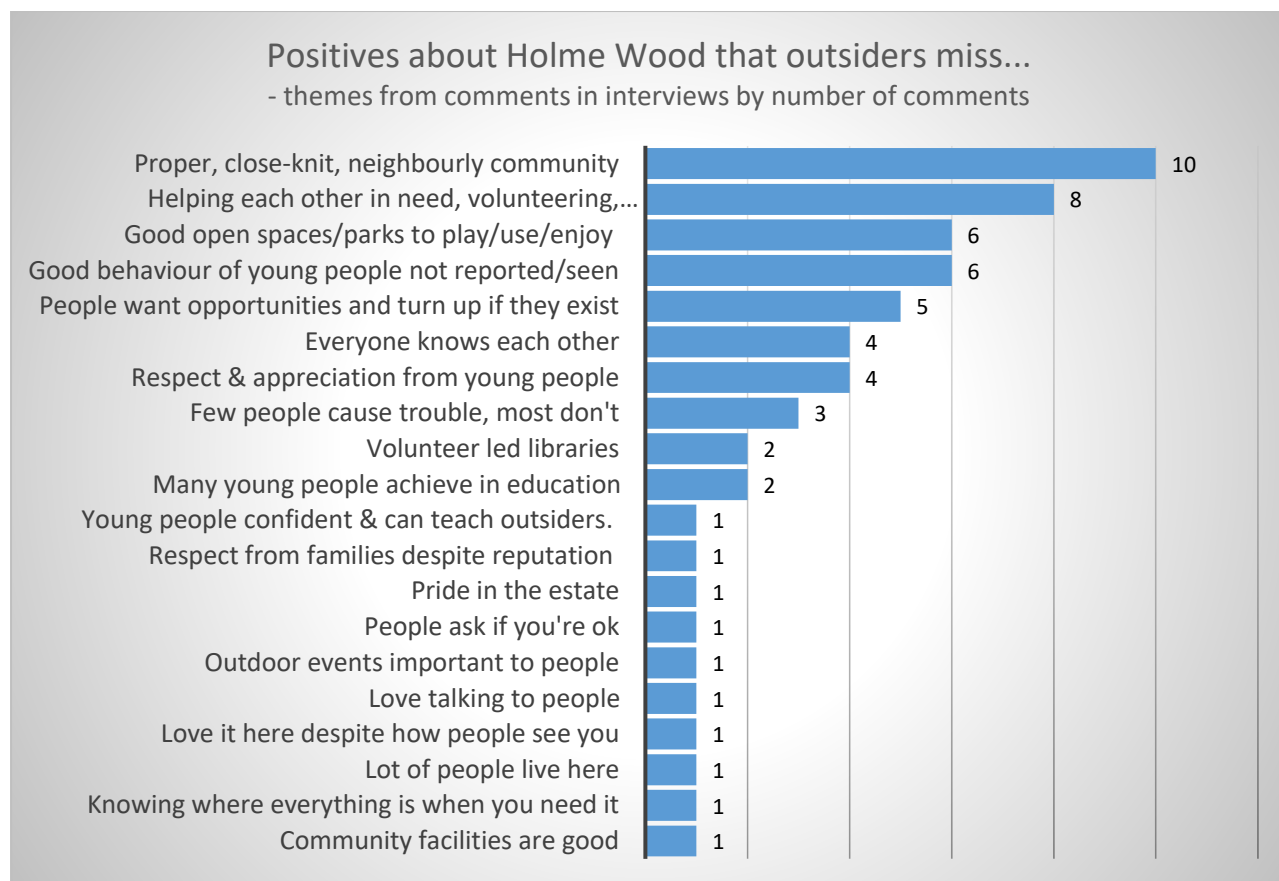
When one of the long-term and highly respected dance practitioners left the programme, there were implications for the relationships and trust that had been built up, and that seemed to be key to the success of Resi/Dance within Holme Wood’s communities. But the fact that the landscape has been rocky means – well, basically, that the research has had to take on new shapes as necessary (as the programme itself has done, and as participants do constantly, during class).

We charted nearly 50 comments about positives of Holme Wood that outsiders may miss. This included comments from 15 HW residents, both children and adults, as well as from DUY staff and external stakeholders. They (see figure 1) show clear agreement about the cohesive community feel that many experience in Holme Wood, but also the aspiration for opportunities, especially for children/young people, and the frustration that bad behaviour by a few is what outsiders focus on.

### 3. What has Resi/Dance meant for individuals, families and the wider community in Holme Wood?

The research has produced four case studies of participants, using their own words to describe the impact of the dance sessions on them and their families. (See material presented separately for these)

When children and young people get involved in dance projects, everyone around them can benefit. The study includes interesting material on the role of parents in relation to young people and dance classes. Some sign their children up for the classes, and support them in attending regularly. Others are less actively supportive, but acknowledge that there are benefits. Many of the children and young people are aware of how their parents struggle, and are realistic about how supportive they can be. They also want to do things right and avoid trouble, looking for safe places to be on the estate. In interviews, many young people talked about how they had enjoyed meeting ‘new’ people, extending their social networks in a positive way. Typically they depend on their school for their social contacts and this looms large in their lives. Going outside that network had a huge positive impact for them although this often created anxieties at first.



*Figure 1: Positive comments about Holme Wood*

Women in the women’s company and those with children in the classes talk compellingly about outcomes of the project for them and their families – what the impacts are at home, including how they use the tools from the classes to manage life and mitigate crises.

It became clear that DUY’s non-judgemental approach, the consistency of weekly work – bringing patterns into chaotic lives – and the care taken to ensure people could safely take part all played a key role in the success of classes. The free provision also meant engagement by many who could not have afforded to pay.

The teaching of dance in Holme Wood had a multi-faceted impact, combining social, psychological, physical, individual and family dimensions. These effects were highlighted through the (free) performances that DUY enabled in the community and in prestigious settings outside of Holme Wood.

But who gets to say what the impacts of projects are? In the case of Resi/Dance, the researchers listened carefully to the voices of participants and their parents/families, and also to local workers who have contributed to the programme and whose work impacts residents of Holme Wood. The experiences of DUY staff and others connected to the project were taken into account too, as well as the observations and insights of the embedded researcher, Dr Louise McDowall.

These impacts can be seen as a ‘ripple effect’ as shown in Figure 2 below, where impacts on the individual potentially ripple out to wider circles of people and into broader networks, organisations and society. Of course, the wider society context and the networks and organisations that surround people, as well as their families and friends, also frame and bear in on what people do or resist doing, and how they think and experience life.

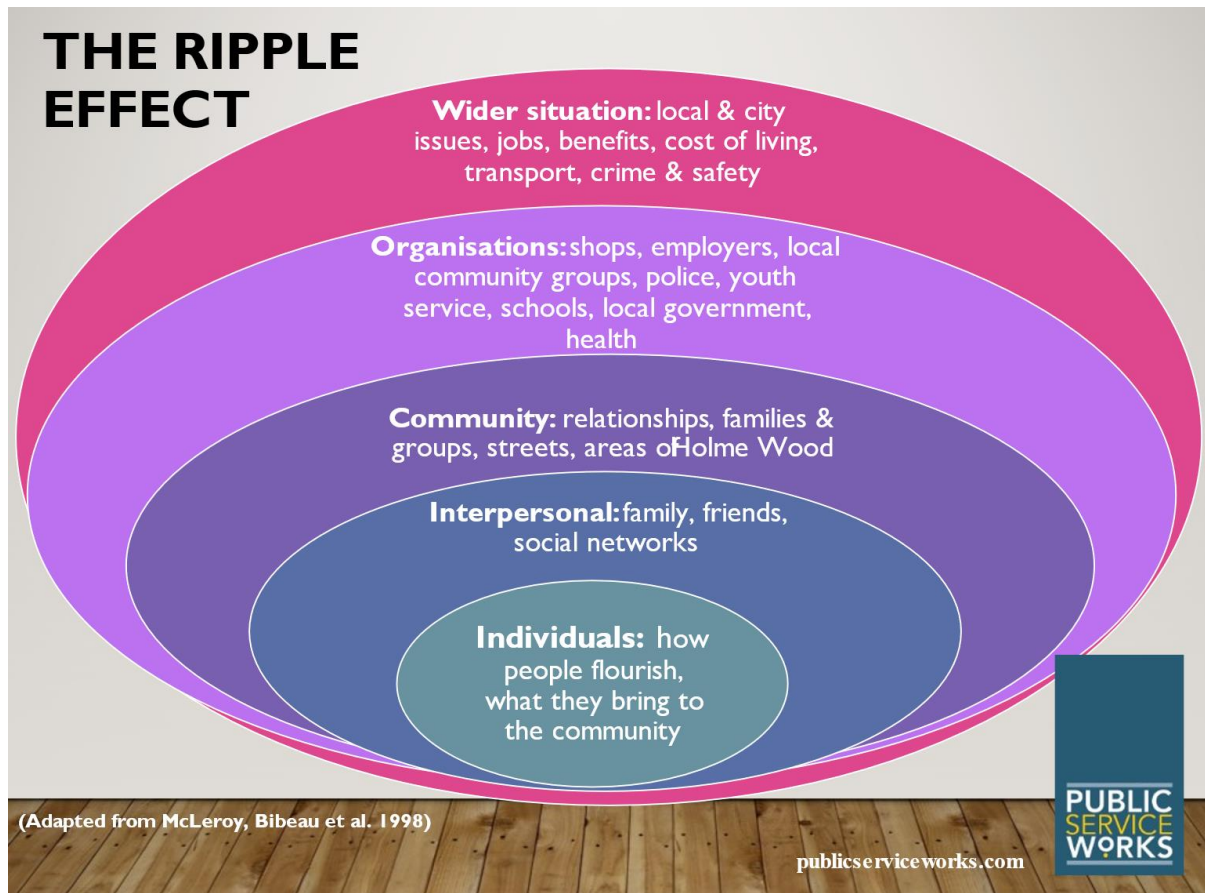


Figure 2 The ripple effect of impacts

### Impacts on individual participants

A person’s post code may not say a great deal about what their life is actually like. The same post code can contain lives of huge difficulty and others of comparative ease. Resi/Dance invited and worked with those – frequently young people – who faced real challenges and struggles – with family circumstances, for example, or mental health or criminal entanglements.

To help DUY better understand the people they were working with, the embedded researcher developed a **bespoke data collection form** modelled around the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) self-report questionnaire.<sup>iii</sup> This tool enabled DUY to capture data on the backgrounds, life circumstances, and observed behaviours of the individuals they worked with, and thus to gain insight into the often complex needs of those people. Data gathered about young session participants shows that in 2023 among the 25 members of the youth company (the oldest youth age group):

- a third lived in a single parent household,
- four in ten had services such as family/social services, key workers, CAMHS, probation involved with them or their family

- nearly half lived or had previously lived with someone who had substance misuse/abuse issues.
- a third had experienced a parent with depression or mental health issues
- more than a third had experience of a family member/carer or member of their household going to prison
- four in ten showed signs of neglect and/or a lack of adult care, protection or oversight such that their needs were not being met.

This profile reflects the position and level of need of young people who DUY might usually expect to recruit into an intensive dance project that takes them out of school and works with them full-time over a period of weeks. The Holme Wood intensive project in December 2022 showed a similar participant profile to the above, all due to the context described in section 2. Working with young people on a weekly basis therefore achieved impressive impact despite spreading input more thinly over time.

*“they’re just genuinely decent people, really are just decent people trying to get by. Just tryn’a do their bit in life. Still want the same for their kids, the best, you know. Umm, still want opportunities, I mean it’s evidence[d] with just how many keep turning up” [Local worker]*

*“an incredibly engaging entertaining project that prevented many [young people] choosing a different path, isolated, disaffected from education, prevented them from choosing the same path over and over. Young people who attended will reinvest that, a kind of knock-on effect - in the work they do, in the schooling they do, their own children later down the line, you plant a seed [with] a project like this” [Local worker]*

So, this was how data was collected during the study; but how was the data filtered and sifted during subsequent analysis? In other words, through what lenses were data, observations and findings viewed in order to build a nuanced picture of the impact of Resi/Dance on the life of Holme Wood? The answer lies in use of the multidimensional concept of **Quality of Life**(QoL).<sup>iv</sup> Understandings of QoL guided the embedded researcher in contextualising and making sense of impacts on individuals engaging in Resi/Dance – and also in determining the extent to which these impacts were visible to family, DUY staff and the wider Holme Wood community, including schools, local councillors, and youth service. There is no universally accepted definition of QoL. The most widely adopted is by The World Health Organisation<sup>v</sup>, summarised below. This is the definition used in this study.

*QoL is individuals’ perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, values, and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept, incorporating in a complex way individual’s physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs, and their relationship to salient features of the environment.*

QoL then is a multidimensional and subjective concept based around an individual’s experiences (psychological, social, physical) in relation to their environment (which is subject to change over time). Given the emergent nature of the research and of Holme



Wood as an estate, this definition of QoL helped to ground and frame the impacts described by residents, participants, and workers by providing the researcher with a sound basis for understanding how (and in what ways) participation in Resi/Dance may have impacted thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

### Psychological impacts

The first step in understanding the psychological impacts that Resi/Dance has had on participants is to look at the specific context of people's lives in Holme Wood. Typically, the community is low in confidence and self-esteem, struggling to survive let alone thrive. Against a background of economic hardship, criminality is often seen to offer solutions. However, particularly amongst adolescents with a lack of meaning and purpose in their lives, what actually follows is a bleak cycle of unrest and violence. Many Holme Wood residents are unaware of their own potential, crushed as they are by limiting self-belief; a lack of access to free services, resources and opportunities; and no avenues to aspirations and influence outside of the estate. Low confidence and self-esteem are reinforced by external views that demonise rather than celebrate the Holme Wood community.

Resi/Dance has brought much needed joy into people's lives through a sustained commitment to offering free dance and arts provision in the area over a four-year period. Holme Wood residents have been provided with:

- Long-term access to activity
- Opportunities to perform in and around Holme Wood
- Opportunities to travel outside the estate and experience performances and performing in theatrical venues (e.g., Riley Theatre, Leeds; St Georges Hall, Bradford; Kala Sangam, Bradford)
- Opportunities to partake in films (*Out of the Woods*), and receive qualifications through Arts Award (Bronze, Silver).

Alongside these specific opportunities, Resi/Dance has provided a structure which prioritises safety, belonging-ness, love, care, and support to enable individuals and their families to flourish. All of these aspects of DUY's work have helped to address the identified self-efficacy and self-esteem issues, alongside the economic hardship this community faces. A growth mindset has been developed and shared that empowers individuals and families to aspire for more, to dream bigger, and to experience success and achievement. The resilience gained from performing in front of people, and the exposure to new ideas, role models and positive influences, enables individuals to succeed, and in turn inspires others in the community who can see their peers/family members succeeding and who are in turn influenced. The following four themes demonstrate how effective DUY has been in meeting and supporting the psychological needs of the Holme Wood community.

### *Increasing confidence, self-esteem, and pride*

Performing in front of an audience – for most participants, that was the peak in being able to identify and illustrate an increase in their confidence. Previously, they had thought of themselves as being either shy, nervous, or unsure of their abilities and capabilities. The sense of pride in themselves which followed a successful performance led to an improved self-esteem and self-concept of being seen in a different light, for their talents, and a newfound knowledge and sense of themselves.

*“at the end we all like say like, we knew that we’d smashed it and everything and that’s what made us confident. The fact that we did it, and we were able to do it and everything” [youth class participant]*

*It’s got me more confident, cos like before I wouldn’t have really gone on stage and that, because I don’t really like doing stuff like that. I’m not really a people person, who I don’t know. So I think it’s got me more confident.[youth company participant]*

*Yeah she [Mum] said that “I’ve got a lot confident and stronger and everything”... at start of it I were like proper shy and didn’t know what to do with myself and then at end of it, it were just like, I’ve got confidence and stronger and stuff. [HW Intensive project participant]*

#### *Developing a growth mindset, empowerment and resilience*

Through access to Arts Award qualifications, performance opportunities, and regular provision of classes where tangible improvements could be seen, DUY provided opportunities for participants to experience achievement and success. The journey was one of hard work, dedication, and commitment towards goal-orientated outcomes. Striving for your dreams, participants learned, was a real possibility; and they started to change the way they looked at the world – as well as shift their perspectives around how the world might look at them.

*“Before they’ve gone to DUY they’re not the same person, DUY have made them believe that they can achieve, and they’ve done something they’ve worked their magic down at DUY and it’s again building that confidence.” [Local worker].*

*“I like the way like it was very different and once I got into it I really liked it, and it’s now how I dance. I’ve learnt that I can do a lot more, umm before like if I ever got doubted then I’d just like I’d leave it, but now I can like actually say to myself “I can do this and they can’t like tell me that I can’t, because I can”*

*“now that I’ve come here, I feel like I can do anything anywhere, and it doesn’t matter where I am, but I can do it.”*

[ResiDance 8-11’s class participants]

#### *Providing a positive focus through access to enjoyable experiences, opportunities, meaningful activity and learning*

Participants and the Holme Wood community demonstrated their appreciation of, and gratitude for, Resi/Dance in a variety of ways, including, crucially, reliably active participation in the programme. Their enthusiasm was, partly at least, a marker of the lack of other avenues to long-term arts activity. They understood and acknowledged how rare this opportunity was for free and consistent arts provision. ResiDance offered a positive focus that centred the participants at the heart of all activities, eliciting much needed laughter, happiness, and smiles.

*“parents coming up to me saying ‘since my child has been involved in this class they focus so much more at school and they engage so much better’.*

*Something to look forward to each week, a better attitude to school because they know that if they don’t work better at school then there’s always something they can miss out on now” [local worker]*

*“So this’s given them a bit of their own independence where they’re safe. Not their own independence where they’re roaming the streets and you don’t know what they’re doing.” [participant parent]*

*Calling on dance as a vehicle for self-expression, psychological resourcing, and emotional regulation*

The medium of dance is the body. And it is through the body that ideas, feelings, and moods are expressed and communicated. Access to dance was a lifeline for many people living in Holme Wood. The lifeline was made up of some key components: access to a non-verbal psychological resource that offered relief from environmental stressors; a coping strategy; a way to find relaxation and calm; and a way to shift and process emotions stored in the body.

*“it’s an effective mental health intervention. Umm, if it was to stop, well to be blunt children’s lives are less enriched ... if things like this get removed we are not enriching their lives” [Local worker]*

*“I’m really awkward like I don’t like talking about my feelings in person. I don’t mind on message cos they can’t see me. But I store a lot, and I just get nervous a lot when I’m talking in person, but with dance you can just, just, yeah, just express yourself basically.” [youth class participant]*

*“The mental health black hole is real, and things like this help address that. And that’s the legacy, achievement, success, happiness, it’s great, it really is. So that, so that without a shadow of a doubt is the legacy of all of this, self-esteem, mental health, and it needs to continue because it works” [Local worker]*

#### Social impacts

The positive social impacts described in this section are directly related to the safe, welcoming, non-judgemental, kind, calm, positive environment that DUY created and that was spearheaded by the dance artists embodying these values and ethos. Familiarity and consistency of DUY artists, a sessions structure, a supportive scaffolding, and clear goals helped to reduce social anxieties and facilitate the building of meaningful relationships.

Key to galvanising the community – and ultimately to the success of the project – was the decision to be in residence in Holme Wood, and for all sessions to be delivered locally, solely for the residents of Holme Wood and the BD4 area. DUY’s presence on the estate helped to de-stigmatise what happened there. ‘Hang ups’ around acceptance and judgement based on background and circumstances could be jettisoned; and the community felt able to rise together through peer support and shared, bonding understandings and experiences.

Crucially, participation in Resi/Dance provided a social network. This helped to influence normative behaviours – in relation to health, for example, or how leisure time was spent. For some people too, the sense of being in a network also engendered a feeling of responsibility and increased motivation. They began to think and act with other people in mind as well as themselves – in particular, their group or DUY personnel. This sense of duty was manifested, for example, in determination not to let anyone down by missing performance-linked dance sessions.

Being identified as a participant in Resi/Dance also enabled individuals to be a part of something, to feel included, and to be clearly linked with DUY's work in Holme Wood. Dance provided a tool for introducing and widening social circles and reinforcing relationships between individuals. The studio practice supported this through promoting opportunities to work in contact, duets, groups, oftentimes problem-solving, creating or rehearsing together.

How exactly did this community-focused programme achieve its social impacts through shared experiences of dance? Five themes stand out.

*Growth in social confidence, communication skills and interactions with positive influences/role models*

ResiDance offered the Holme Wood community an exposure to different influences and people that they would not have ordinarily been in spaces with, or had access to – for example, DUY artists, dance professionals such as choreographer Gary Clarke, and Matthew Bourne's New Adventures Dance Company.

The different influences started close to home. Young participants in Resi/Dance worked with pupils from different schools – often quite a challenge – and met people of various ages and backgrounds, and living in different parts of the estate. Importantly, dance sessions were reported as increasing participants' ability to identify and reflect on what social situations they work best within and why. Sessions also provided good preparation for having to work with people that you might not like, or get on with, yet still need to work with. A newfound patience or tolerance around other people, and not being reactive to a situation was felt/seen by many, including parents and professionals the participants interact with.

*“when they put us with random people it's good cos you get to work with different people and not just your mates. So you get to like make more mates, d'ya know what I mean?”* [youth company participant]

*“I think I've got more patience now, like, I used to just snap at everything. And like, as we know on the last project, that's what I used to do. I would just scream at somebody if they did something wrong, like, or if they messed about, I would just scream at them. But now I'll just like compose it, and then it does get build up, for about three days, and then it does all come out. But at least it's better than it coming out straightaway.”*

[Intensive project participant]

*“he's learning something educational, he's with role models, you are not bad people, you are not teaching him wrong things, you're teaching him*

*to be a responsible gentleman one day. And this is what as parents, we just want, but there's not enough of it" [participant parent]*

*Having a safe, welcoming, caring, positive, and non-judgemental environment*

The environment DUY creates is a place of safety, sanctuary, and almost familial relationships. The importance of these features cannot be overestimated in enabling the social development of participants.

*"It made me nervous that everyone knew what they were doing and I didn't, but X really helped me and X. And they just proper welcomed me, and all the girls are nice, they're like my family. I love them all to pieces and they just help me." [youth company participant]*

*"a lot of these kids don't have meaningful relationships they have parents that say, "Get outside you're doing ma head in". You know and that's not a meaningful relationship that's quite a toxic relationship. To create those meaningful relationships is very, very difficult, so to do it as young as possible if an organisation manages to do that then that's an amazing thing and it teaches them then that relationships can be meaningful when they're adults. [participant parent]*

*Experiencing social support and bonding through shared backgrounds and activities*

Resi/Dance has reached an impressive range of Holme Wood's community. Different age groups have taken part with enthusiasm – including parents and toddlers, 4-7's, 8-11's, youth company. Adult classes homed in on special interests, such as women's fitness. Opportunities to bond were achieved through shared activities and experiences (dance, joy/laughter, performances, learning choreography) and shared backgrounds.

*"I've learnt that I've got it's basically like another life as well, cos I've got the school life, home life and then I've got dance life as well. So it's just unleashed a new life" [youth class participant]*

*"I've most enjoyed seeing more people and how they like dancing, but also like making a full-on dance altogether and like, it's kind of like as a dance family. And I really like the way that it's like that." [8-11's class participant]*

*"It sort of like gives you a lift, when we walked out and I were speaking to girls I was like "Oh I could just like do that again". Normally in exercise I'd be like "No, I'm not doing exercise" but when you go in, I think like you feel confident because there's other-other ladies around you, like they're the same as you. Because they're not all confident, but you go in there and you see them and you build together as a team. And some of them we've even made good friendships out of 'em as well."*

*"Yeah it's-it's just like the bonding as well, we also have, we have a laugh as well, it's not just all about – and just joke." [women's class participants]*

*Free opportunities and regular provision delivered in Holme Wood provided something to do*  
ResiDance represented a lifeline for many, as the dance sessions were often the only thing that they attended during the week outside of school, home, or work. It provided inspiration for a community – that more is out there, and there are opportunities for you to

grasp! Free, regular sessions throughout a four-year period on the estate provided a wealth of opportunities for people to engage in a sustainable habit, to cultivate a hobby, and potentially a home practice. Additionally, access to opportunities to perform, experience professional dance work, film opportunities and travel outside of the estate expanded horizons and experiences.

*“it’s free, you don’t need to pay it’s really good, you can learn quite a lot off of it, and it’s a really fun decision to make.”* (youth class participant)

*“when stuffs free, it’s obviously gonna be an incentive for kids to do, but not only that, it’s an incentive for adults to send ‘em to things, because we ‘ant got that much money. Let’s be honest, I’m broke. So, I can’t afford – I’ve got 2 [kids] if this lesson was £5 each that’s £10.”* [participant parent]

*“I first came across DU when they put leaflets in the school. And I was looking for something for my kids to do because there weren’t many after school clubs or things like that. And I really wanted them to get into extra-curricular stuff rather than sat in front of a screen, because like that’s the most frustrating thing. Because even I don’t sit in front of a screen all day you know? I’m just like “I don’t want you to do that”. When childhood obesity is such a massive thing now, you know?”* [Parent]

*Fostering of positive socially engaged behaviour(s), life skills, and communication, throughout the sessions and teaching style*

DUY cultivates a non-competitive climate in which people can access and experience dance. Important aspects of a professional dance environment are simulated – such as self-discipline, the showing of respect, punctuality, commitment, ability to work with others, and a challenge to excel. Participants have positive behaviours modelled to them, which help to develop people’s knowledge and selection of healthier habits around food, drink, lifestyle choices and safety.

*“parents coming up to me saying ‘since my child has been involved in this class they focus so much more at school and they engage so much better’. Something to look forward to each week, a better attitude to school because they know that if they don’t work better at school then there’s always something they can miss out on now”* [local worker]

*“dance isn’t the most important thing that’s happening in the space. Umm I think it’s about communication, discipline, respect”* [Local worker].

*“he’s with role models, there’s no bad distractions, nobody tryna get ‘im to smoke, nobody tryn’a get ‘im to throw stones at buses. He’s doing something good ‘ere, he’s doing something for the community, he’s with the community, and that’s it. It’s the role models for me.”* [participant parent].

Physical impacts

It may come as a surprise to the reader that physical effects were not the first impact discussed here. In fact, the effects of dance on the bodies of participants were the least reflected upon and discussed impact across all interviewees, and were not highlighted at all

as a visible impact by external stakeholders such as schools, youth service and counsellors. So why is this?

What the study shows is that dance offers so much more than physical exercise. The psycho-social impacts were more tangibly traced by all interviewees and were clearly visible to external workers in the area. The nuanced considerations of physicality and impact were only gleaned and observable to those who had directly engaged in dance, the DUY artists, and the embedded researcher.

There could be several reasons for this, such as that the psycho-social needs of the Holme Wood community were seen as greater and therefore necessitating the most attention. Yet a consideration may be that culturally we lack a sophistication of language around physicality, embodiment, and the body. It can be argued that we are so removed from understanding our bodies in the first place that we simply do not have the language or vocabulary to articulate what it is that we are either experiencing or witnessing when we engage in dance. This stands in sharp contrast to the language and vocabulary we can draw upon to discuss our state of mind, mental health, social needs, and relationships.

Given these reservations, the reporting of physical impacts in this section relies heavily on the observations of DUY artists and the embedded researcher to draw out the physical nuances observed and reflected upon by participants. The most striking findings are:

- There was a marked vacuum for participants between initial transition from home life and the external Holme Wood environment and entering the TFD centre, the dance space. Dance filled this vacuum by providing an energetic outlet that allowed ResiDance participants to harness, refocus, and calm the high states of arousal they were typically experiencing.
- Participants greatly valued having access to a physical, non-verbal means of expression and communication.
- Resi/Dance offered refuge and respite from chaotic lives, and also resourced those engaging in the dance sessions with a potential strategy to process and shift emotions they were feeling through the activity.
- At times, dance provided the means for people to simply have a break, to take time out and away from their problems where for an hour or two challenging and perhaps longstanding issues were not in the foreground of their existence.

The following five themes group the main physical impacts of Resi/Dance sessions on participants.

#### *Tangible improvements in strength, flexibility, fitness, and exercise tolerance*

Participants reported physical improvements such as feeling stronger in their bodies, feeling more flexible, having an improved fitness level, and an increased endurance and tolerance for sustained exercise. Many participants were also inspired to seek out more opportunities to be active, or maintain the energetic lift they were experiencing due to moving.

*“I’m more flexible than I used to be. Like I’ve always been really flexible but cos I weren’t doing anything since I were about 11, ...except for PE. So, when I started doing dance again, I became more like bendy and stuff like that” [youth class participant]*

*the punches and the...because it was like at a speed and then you’d just, you’d just get the aggression out. And even the exercise, like squats would push you to your limit, d’ya know what I mean, where you think “I can’t do this” and then I think as it built on, I think I did about 3 and then me legs were like done in, and then eventually towards the end we did the full song, which were like a massive achievement. [women’s class participant]*

*And like I go out on bike rides every night as well, so that I don’t lose the energy to when I come here again. [youth class participant]*

*Dance provides an energetic outlet and way to express self through the body*

Positive and negative emotions and energy are stored and harnessed in the body. Dance provides an opportunity to harness, process, shift, and make sense of these emotions and energies through a non-verbal route of communication. Communicating through the body felt easier for many. Dance provided an outlet for unharnessed energy and meant high states of arousal were able to be refocused and calmed.

*“Before dance we all come in ‘ere and run around. Yeah literally we waste all our energy just running around” [youth class participant]*

*“Dance is more of a physical thing, I feel so much better after I’ve danced I’m just ‘Ahh I feel great now’ like a weight’s lifted and I’ve got all that out of me because I’ve just thrown it into the movement” [women’s class participant]*

*Developing an exercise habit*

Dance provided a physical practice for people that could be actioned at home, through repeating exercises or practicing choreographic material learnt during sessions. Hence, for some, participation in the dance sessions had an extended impact that translated into home life, encouraging physicality, movement, focus, and an appetite for more. The development of an exercise habit, particularly at a younger age, can operate as a protective factor into later life, meaning that the likelihood of engaging or re-engaging in activity into adulthood is more likely.

*“Even the next day, you think “Well I did that” and I still, I still do some of the exercises every morning in the kitchen, just to keep it going” [women’s class participant].*

*when I first started, I didn’t do as much, but now I really like it, and I do, I don’t just do like Thursdays I do it at home as well. And I really like the way that this has made me do that. [8-11’s class participant]*

*Developing an awareness of, and attention to, your interior body*

Engaging in dance facilitates an understanding of feelings in your body, how you perceive movement in parts of your body, how you carry yourself, your presence, and how much



space you inhabit within a room. Acknowledging and taking time to notice these aspects around your breath, posture, alignment, distribution of weight through your feet, provide another key and tool for unlocking physical and embodied confidence and enabling bodied change – in short, to feel comfortable in your own skin.

*“We taught her just drop shoulders back, chin up, just stand and be present, and I think that changed. I think it was like a stress relief for her because she wouldn’t take her coat off when she danced, she’d like slouch and crunch her shoulders up, she was just so in herself I don’t think she realised how to get out. I think it was like a relief [to] release the tension she was holding and all the anger, and thoughts of everything going on with her and she just relaxed her shoulders and she just like opened, literally like a flower” [DUY artist]*

*“our focus exercise is the one I see as being most beneficial for preparing the body and improving the posture. Umm we have a lot of people in the youth company well, well they go round the streets and they hang out, and you can see that kind of hanging in their body. A lot of them have so much like, curvature because they’re just like - err down all the time, a lot of people have erm like sunken shoulders, they drop their head and you can see then, the eye line exercise at the start of each class, that - there’s literally one of the youth company members that I’m thinking of, and that changes her whole energy like her chest comes forward, her shoulders go back, her chin comes out.” [DUY Artist]*

*“Because I’ve been feeling proper comfortable in ma body, and I don’t wanna lose that confidence” [youth class participant]*

*Willingness to learn more about ways to support physical health, nutrition, and lifestyle choices*

DUY has always maintained an interest in supporting and encouraging nutrition and healthy eating through the provision of cooked meals on their intensive projects. This commitment was replicated during Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions through the Healthy Holidays program which delivered food packages and supported families with meal planning and recipes.

*...that’s why it was so important when we did the work, the healthy holidays work, that – I was really – I was really clear, that we weren’t just putting food packages together with crisps and sausage rolls. That actually that-that the food packages were a part of...it was department of education who funded it. So, it was important that we were actually putting together packages of food that was healthy. [DUY Staff]*

Wider ripples of impact

The programme has begun to demonstrate the sheer impact for the wider family of engaging in the arts through dance. Parents and relatives are shown to value the experience and enjoy the impact on their children, aiming to keep fostering this new interest.

Much of the material evidencing the positive effects of the programme on participants is drawn from local workers with other agencies, as well as from Resi/Dance participants and their families. This demonstrates how effectively the DUY programme connected with local agencies, encouraging them to see Holme Wood families differently, and to notice the young people's progress and growth in skills and confidence. This positive noticing in turn affects how those workers do their jobs and relate to the families on the estate.

This impact is hard to measure and arguably in its early stages, being built on only in 2022–2023 after Covid-related lockdown and other constraints hi-jacked much of the setting-up/building partnerships stage of Resi/Dance. But there is clearly strong and widespread desire in Holme Wood to see a continuation of the weekly provision of dance sessions – and to engage more schools, to get the support of youth services and criminal justice schemes to develop activities, to involve more young men, and to support struggling lone parents.

The programme demonstrates how investing in people in a local area, however deprived, can achieve a huge amount, compared to, say, investing in a physical community centre. The project staff often expressed the desire to have a purpose built dance space. But it can be argued that it was the focus of all DUY staff on Holme Wood people that enabled the high levels of participant commitment to dance that they achieved. Ironically, it is the participants who are now the ones saying '*we need a proper studio*' !

#### 4 Real-life learning: takeaways for DUY

Action research, when combined with active reflection by decision-makers, can lead to constructive change in real time. Throughout the study the team has aimed to engage DUY in exploring the potential here. Discussions of this kind can be quite challenging for all involved. For example, it's hard not to be defensive when well established and accepted practices are subject to scrutiny. And the significance of the distinction between what is based on evidence and what on assumptions may not be immediately apparent. The key, as usual with sensitive and important communications, is mutual respect, along with commitment to active listening – attributes which, thankfully, were present in abundance during the Resi/Dance project.

##### Whose decision is this anyway?

Naturally in a project that extends over several years, DUY staff have grown in experience and seen a shifting of responsibilities among them. But the study revealed a lack of clarity around the expectations and duties involved when changing roles and job titles e.g., 'trainee – artist', and so on. This lack of clarity in job roles created fuzzy boundaries, and was echoed within decision-making. Staff commented that oftentimes decision-making felt inconsistent and it became hard to gauge why certain decisions were made. Examples included decisions around safeguarding; during intensives, when a YP was dismissed from a project and when not; and discrepancies around staff workload, particularly during intensives. The result was that on occasion staff felt at sea, alone in their decision-making, rather than unified through a team understanding of how to approach certain situations.

##### Action

- DUY leadership agreed that it was crucial that decision-making should be seen to be consistent, and there was a need to demystify some organisational processes by

making the decision-making more transparent for staff. Steps were taken to share thinking and rationales with staff – partly through beefed-up informal mentoring.

- DUY leadership also initiated a review of the whole process of recruiting, training and supporting dance practitioners/facilitators, and clarifying roles and opportunities at each stage, with a view to identifying and consolidating good practice.

### Does one size fit all?

The DUY methodology was tried and tested within intensive projects, yet not within community sessions. How stringent were practitioners with this set of methods and principles? Was there scope and play for the practitioner or participants to influence this approach, and for participants' voices, creativity, and needs within the space to change the range of possible outcomes, including a loosening of what was considered 'the DUY approach'? Crucially, how should the DUY methodology be understood by practitioners – creatively or as instructional?

### Action

- This issue was seen to be linked with the above issue of decisions. If dance practitioners were unclear about the frameworks within which they were operating, they would naturally be cautious in their decisions and stick to the tried-and-tested. But scope for creativity lay at the heart of the Resi/Dance initiative, so it was agreed that it was entirely appropriate that practitioners should feel free to push the boundaries. Again, informal mentoring proved to be a constructive approach to supporting them in doing this.
- DUY leadership also committed themselves to:
  - Map out different progression routes for young people who had participated in dance sessions, and plan to support them in their new situation.
  - Explore as a matter of urgency further possibilities for work with boys and young men.

### Are communications really two-way?

Effective communication depends on a good balance between speaking and listening – but a balance of this kind is notoriously difficult to achieve. Some stakeholders in Resi/Dance, including potential partners, felt that they were being spoken at by DUY rather than listened to. Others commented that they would have liked to hear more – and, specifically, to see more – of DUY's work on its website and elsewhere.

Where the people at the heart of the work are often marginalised and feel themselves to be so, it is all the more important for the organisation offering a creative programme to demonstrate that they actively want to listen to different ways of experiencing the world.

### Action

No formulae are immediately available for this important but tricky balance... And the challenges are particularly stark when the organisation concerned is very small, with highly committed people already working under huge pressure. Steps taken include:

- Consolidating relationships with existing partner organisations (made much easier by a rapidly growing roll of honour), and taking every opportunity to open up links with potential new partners.

- Entering into arrangements with film companies to highlight the work being done in Holme Wood and elsewhere.

## 5. Emerging themes

So, what has this long and unusual evaluation have to say that is new and valuable to a wide range of stakeholders? A number of core themes emerge that are of importance first of all to DUY but potentially to other audiences too. Some of these are outlined briefly below – along with important further questions that are raised.

### ‘Topping and tailing’

DUY has always aimed to ground its programmes in the life of the individuals and communities involved, and to be clear from the beginning about what participants can expect and what the company expects. The experience of Resi/Dance reinforces the need for grounding and clarity – and also highlights the extraordinary effort, and length of time, needed to do so successfully. What could be called ‘pastoral wrap-around’ includes preparatory home visits, conversations with potential participant and family, reminder phone calls – all the scaffolding needed to build the confidence and desire to take part in the programme. The participation of any individual in the programme is, typically, prefaced by many weeks of to-ing-and fro-ing on the part of supportive team members. Figure 3 illustrates the scaffolding of care and support that DUY provides.

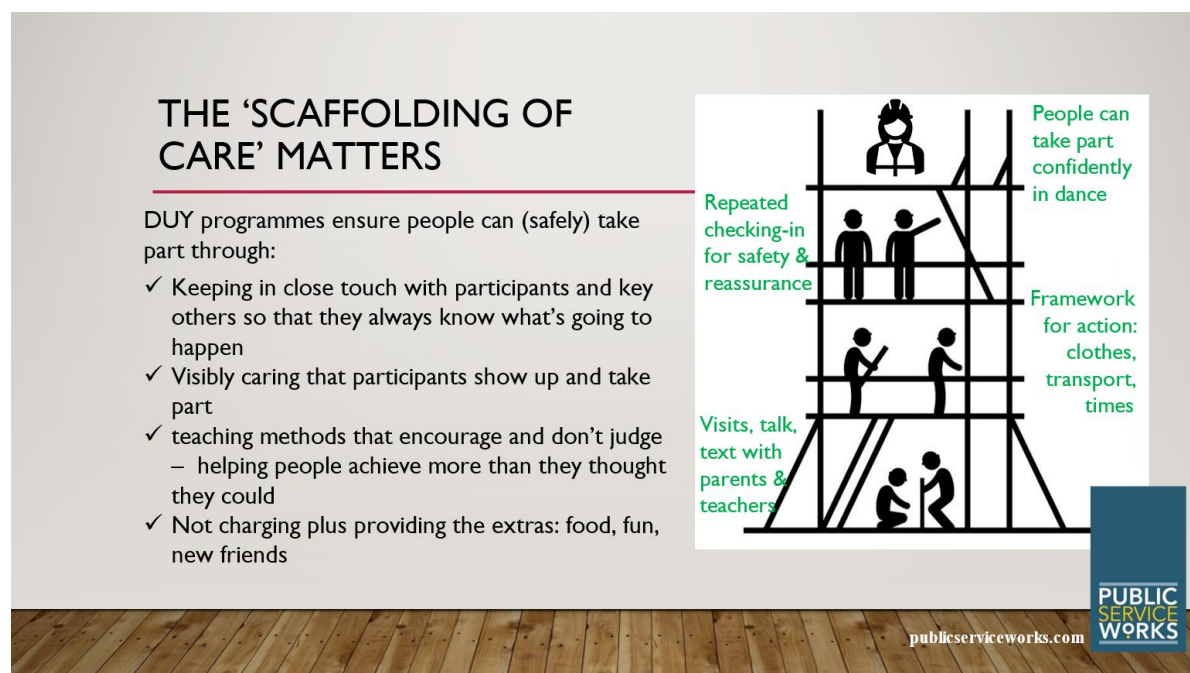


Figure 3 The DUY ‘scaffolding of care’

The ‘tailing’ challenge loomed ahead of Resi/Dance in its final months, and was no less challenging for this unique project. The ‘tail’ of Resi/Dance – its legacy – would be inextricably linked with the quality of the relationships that had been developed with stakeholders in the community. These included schools, youth service, agencies from the criminal justice system, health organisations, churches, local community groups. As with pastoral work with programme participants, the effort needed here was substantial – and in many ways invisible. Successful partnership depends, amongst other things, on the

development of mutual understanding and respect. In the case of a multi-layered programme like Resi/Dance, a commitment to mutual learning proved a powerful binding agent. The nature of potential funding opportunities would also be influential. Who cares about the future for this community, and what will the legacy look like?

### Pushing ahead is the way to go

Interviewees from different backgrounds (some in professional dance, some participants and partners from the community) commented on the abiding value of 'pushing'. The push could be applied to boundaries, content, people. The impetus is to challenge in a good way; to stimulate; to provoke and spark progress; to demonstrate that the push amounts to a belief that further progress can be constructively made. Push in this context can perhaps be usefully contrasted with the idea of 'pity' sometimes associated with attitudes to community dance. Push is an aspect of **professionalism** – that concept so important to DUY's work. However, in a context like Resi/Dance, it may be that 'push' works well for participants but not for staff without an increase in capacity/numbers – for example, an enhanced capacity to co-create choreography with participants and rehearse it for performance.

People interviewed shared their thoughts on professionalism and quality. Interestingly, on 'professionalism' project participants highlighted just a few powerful elements (listed below and shown by \* in Figure 4 below) of the many aspects professionals felt important:

- achieving excellence compared to everyone's expectations
- making the dance in weekly sessions more exciting
- professional performance in professional spaces

*"What they've done to turnaround the sports hall you know? When I saw it yesterday I were like "Oh this'll look good" Then... I've come in today and there's a big backdrop, there's lights and I'm like "Wow" yeah" (youth class participant)*

These are naturally about their experience in the project, not the inputs and conditions for that experience to happen which were emphasised by professionals and external stakeholders.

In relation to conversations about '**quality**', a similar split was seen: professionals focused on what it takes to **create** quality and participants focused on their **experience** to say what quality was for them. For professional dance artists high quality is created by:

- Relationships made in the process
- Everyone feeling and experiencing high quality

*"when we bring 'em on stage they look calm and presentable and they're performing something of quality. Like it would be an injustice if you put them on the stage and they didn't do something that was of a high quality, because it's just a waste of time really, they don't feel like they've achieved anything" [dance artist]*

- A passion for dance
- Focus on not allowing quality to slip
- Importance of research and methodology
- Professionalism



Figure 4 What is professionalism?

For participants who commented, quality meant the audience being truly moved, their achievement of artistic excellence and achieving this level from a free programme.

*“My Dad hates anything to do with the arts, hates it, absolutely hates it. Even my Mum she wasn’t overly keen, they came to that piece and they left crying their eyes out and said that it was the most beautiful thing that they had ever seen [laughs] and it really, really moved them, and she was like “it was like I’d paid to go to this, as if we were in a theatre type thing”*

*“Grandma and grandad came to watch as well. They were really excited and now that we’ve got them on DVD sometimes every now and again we watch ‘em... they was expecting like for me to be there, but like they wasn’t expecting for like all the big movements and lifts and things”*

*“I’m glad that I’m actually coming to like a proper dance group as well”*

#### Finding patterns can be life-affirming

A sense of pattern and consistency can be very powerful. This can be at a macro level (where the dance session gives structure and meaning to the week) and at the micro level – for example, during a dance session, participants may experience a working through of emotions relating to warm-up (getting rid of aggression, etc), dance (feeling free) and calming down at the end. Pattern and habit can stand in contrast to what is often experienced as the chaos of life in Holme Wood (‘it gets a bit hectic’). But there are important times when what would benefit participants in Resi/Dance – such as

classes/events during school holidays – clash with the need for dance practitioners to have time out from the weekly programme. How can sustainable and positive patterns of activity be developed for both participants and staff?

#### Implications of extending duration of arts projects

The disadvantages of short-term arts projects have been clear for some time – summarised as: parachuting in and out leaves host community pretty much untouched or, sometimes, resentful. But what are the substantive benefits associated with longer term embedded projects? And are there new hazards to be avoided? For example, in a long-term project, the status of the arts practitioner may look quite different on the insider/outsider dimension – and this may lead to conflicts/dilemmas, especially when the project is drawing to an end. An important consideration is that, rightly in longer term projects, expectations are raised – and, for many, ending is harder to face, leaving a bigger hole and bigger sense of not being valued. Consequently, there is considerable pressure for a project to continue – especially as a visible presence locally where, for example, young people are learning about teamwork and leadership. This, it could be argued, is the very essence of building social capital.

#### Role of the arts practitioner

Resi/Dance has seen some tough learning about the role of the arts practitioner. It is no easy matter for employer or employee to set healthy boundaries in a chaotic and complex setting like Holme Wood. But if a practitioner is to work effectively within a community marked by deprivation, illness and violence, they are likely to need carefully tailored support. The concept of ‘scaffolding of care’ (see Figure 3 above), which can be used in relation to staff as well as participants in DUY projects, offers one way forward.

Not surprisingly perhaps, the study has shown that practitioners who are personally familiar with life on large estates cope better with the challenges presented by environments like Holme Wood. Most practitioners, whatever their background, were taken aback by the scale and intensity of the effort needed to draw participants into the programme. However, several practitioners expressed surprise and pleasure on finding that, once they had been enrolled, many participants became regular and enthusiastic attenders of classes.

A related issue. Trust between practitioner and participants is generally considered key to the success of community arts projects. Can this project reinforce/shed new light on this? Is there something unique about dance that facilitates the development of feelings of trust? What might cause loss of trust, how does this impact the work, and what could be done to prevent this?

#### High standards depend on real team work

Almost universally, the dance practitioners were perceived as being non-judgmental; and this quality was rated very highly. It was also noted and appreciated that the practitioners avoided triggering judgmental attitudes within the group. The dance practitioners themselves were clear that it was very important for them to prepare before and to de-brief with each other after sessions, and let off steam if necessary. However, both practitioners

and participants agreed that working towards high standards was crucial to the success of the programme.

Participants are looking for ever more challenge and complexity in what they learn, including bringing in their own ideas. Many participants – and many partner organisations – showed great interest in exploring the question, ‘Where next?’ There was agreement that it was essential to celebrate achievement – but it would also be highly desirable to map out clear potential progression routes.

### Do ‘intensives’ trump weekly classes in achievement?

Some people see DUY as prioritising the ‘intensives’ as dance work that is substantial, evidenced and produces best outcomes. How fair is this? There is good evidence of sustained engagement in weekly classes. Is the value of these classes clear to all? Might it be possible to create more ‘milestones’ in order for people to see, feel and appreciate success and progress over a series of classes? Participants wanted to input more into the creative dimension of weekly classes, and dance artists wanted more scope – and resource – to develop participants in technique and in creating choreography themselves.

### Incorporating the idea of audience

All art forms include a sense of gaze. Words need to be read; pictures need to be looked at; dance needs an audience. A basic sharing has to take place. Community dance projects are likely to have internal (from within the community) and external (from outside the community) audiences. What does this project tell us about what success looks like in each case? Through performance, participants found themselves ‘facing the world’ with more confidence. Audiences from within the community were amazed at times to see people from (and therefore to an extent representative of) their community achieve so much. This excitement was clear both in relation to the ‘intensives’ and the performance achievements of the weekly groups. Echoing the previous section, what can be done to showcase creativity from the weekly sessions despite the challenge of time constraints? How can the weekly sessions also achieve the visibility that intensive projects do?

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<sup>i</sup> For a comprehensive summary of material on action research, its origins and practices, see: Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. (Eds.) (2012) *Handbook of Action Research (Second Edition)*, London: Sage.

<sup>ii</sup> This question links to ideas of a ‘theory of change’: that projects should work out why they think what they do will have the desired effects and then evaluate where that was right. It builds on ideas of realist evaluation. See Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. *Realistic Evaluation*. 1997 London: Sage

<sup>iii</sup> Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Marks, J. S. 1998. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 14(4), 245–258.

<sup>iv</sup> Ventegodt S, Merrick J, Andersen NJ. Quality of life theory I. 2003. The IQOL theory: an integrative theory of the global quality of life concept. *Scientific World Journal*.13:3 1030-40

<sup>v</sup> The WHOQOL Group, *World Health Organisation Quality of Life Assessment*. 1995 p1405