

Time to Shine learning briefing

Artist reflections: Introducing Zoom sessions into care homes for In Mature Company

February 2022



Ellen is a dance artist working on a Time to Shine project called [In Mature Company](#) led by [Yorkshire Dance](#).

Ellen spent time reflecting on her experiences of setting up and running creative Zoom sessions in care homes in 2021. These Zoom sessions were developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges of meeting with residents face-to-face in care homes. The following learning briefing follows a Q&A format using Time to Shine's questions and Ellen's answers.

Q: What expectations did you have?

A: I had the following worries:

- care staff may struggle using technical equipment
 - participants may find it harder to engage without me physically being in their space
 - it would take time for care staff to learn the process of logging on to a Zoom session
 - it would take me time to figure out the right pace for the sessions
 - it may be a challenge trying to run the Zoom sessions alone without another artist involved
 - participants may have accessibility issues like struggling to hear or see me
 - how to conduct a risk assessment - making sure participants stay safe (not falling or injuring themselves during the session)
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Q: How did reality differ from your expectations?

All my expectations were accurate but because I had anticipated them, I made preparations to overcome them. Other unexpected issues and positive outcomes were:

Positive outcomes

- Me being on Zoom giving instructions encouraged greater staff interaction with participants.
- Staff were gaining confidence to help guide and dance with participants. It had given them an opportunity to have some ownership in helping with the success of the sessions.
- Introducing 'themes' and creating a 'party vibe' each week. This helped build excitement throughout the week within the homes.
- Homes becoming more involved - participants dressed up, decorated their homes, and did other arts activities during the week that linked with the dance session.
- Regular participants who would keep coming back each week
- Participation numbers were high. Our highest overall session had 48 participants.

Negative issues

- There were a couple of occasions where participants fell asleep and there were no staff in the room to assist them, although this was unusual as most care homes had staff present.
- Technical issues with the care homes that I could not talk or guide through.
- A power cut at my base.
- Accessibility issues: poor lighting, small space, camera not catching all movements.
- Not able to learn names - this meant it was harder to give feedback, make person-centred comments and be able to find out about each participant.
- Person-centred tasks and tasks around touch are a challenge and dependent on care staff.
- Homes arriving late, having to stop teaching and help with technical difficulties. It also meant that they missed the risk assessment disclaimer at the start of the session.
- Needing to take register/numbers - doing this alone when groups would sometimes be 15 minutes late was challenging and would stop the flow of the sessions.
- During lockdown my physical set up - setting up my base so it was appropriate to move in is a timely process, which takes up to 45-60 minutes. Purchasing additional equipment was needed so I could be clearly heard (head mic) and seen (lighting system) back drop.

Q: What did you do?

I ran weekly creative dance Zoom sessions over 20 weeks (April-June, August- November.) During the sessions I encouraged movement range and dynamic quality, creativity, moments of touch and connection, social interactions, improvement to confidence, physical fitness, mobility and ultimately improve mental wellbeing for participants and staff.

I would open up the Zoom 15 minutes early for care homes to sign in early. Here I would have a 'Holding screen' where care homes and hubs can register who is taking part, do a technical and

digital check and prepare for the session. Once the session had started I then proceeded to do a verbal risk assessment. During this time I made it clear that staff members were welcome to get involved, help with participants and use their instincts when taking part in the session (i.e. if they wanted to do a standing partner dance with a participant who can confidently stand, that is allowed.) I would always try to address people by name but over Zoom, it can be very hard to recognise who is who - particularly when there can be over 10 people joining from one home/hub.

My sessions would then be structured into four sections:

1. **Warm up** - this would be a follow-me style activity, during this I would perform a range of movements whilst observing participants. Noticing the different levels of interaction and energy. I would then adjust my warm up accordingly to what I witnessed. I also observed staff - How many were getting involved and which home/hub may need more assistance.
2. **Improvisation / repertoire** - This would be an improvisational creative task or a simple set phrase of movement that participants can follow, based on the theme of that week.
3. **Music / creative task**- I always included a moment for social interactions. Over Zoom this is challenging but I would ask a question which would be related to that week's theme or ask for music requests if it was appropriate. I would give a couple of minutes and then staff from the homes would write in the chat box what participants had said. With this information we would create dance moves or use their music suggestions to encourage different types of movement tasks. In this section it could include moments of touch and introduce any movement actions that we may not have introduced to the session yet.
4. **Cool down** - This would include breathing, reaching and stretching (I often include this in the warm up too.) I used natural sounds like waves, forests, or winds. Then we would have a song to sing together at the end. With this I would encourage hand holding.

Throughout the session trying to get participation data was difficult as staff could be resistant to write in the chat. I would ask at the start of the session and get as many names written in the chat as possible, then if any late comers arrived I would invite them to write names in at the end of the session. I would then screenshot the conversation to have a record of who joined. This was also a great way of getting written feedback. Having another member of Yorkshire Dance staff or an assistant artist to help with this would have been useful.

Q: Who took part?

Overall, I feel that the running of this project went really well. We had a number of participants who regularly returned each week and we had a total of 10 care homes sign up (we started with 4.) Participation numbers also increased with the 2nd session only having 16 participants join but then by the end, we had 34 participants taking part. This tells me that the structure was working, more homes and hubs heard about the success of the Zoom sessions and wanted to participate.

Issues that I faced were not being able to offer person-centred sessions and struggling to encourage moments of touch. These are tools I would use during my in-person sessions. Trying to

encourage this was incredibly challenging over Zoom, as having verbal discussion was not possible. With touch the best way of explaining this was always through physical demonstration in the space with the participants. This was obviously not possible via Zoom. Encouraging touch relied solely on staff members helping to facilitate this by using verbal guidance. Some homes were better at this than others. I think this happened due to the availability and confidence levels of staff in each home/hub. As a result in some homes we saw great success with care staff engaging more than in person sessions however this was not consistent across all homes.

Q: How did you gather feedback?

Information was difficult to gather as I was working alone. I got some feedback from care delivery service (Leeds City Council) colleagues and staff members, but most of my information has come from my personal observations. Having an external observer, member of Yorkshire Dance staff or Dementia Care Mapper™ to oversee the sessions would have been incredibly useful. Although not possible during the pandemic to have someone in the room it may be possible to have someone over Zoom to support evaluation. Trying to evaluate the success of the project alone via Zoom was incredibly tough due to the poor visibility and audio and also for the fact I was having to teach, help with technical issues, collect register data, play music and risk assess all at the same time.

Q: What would you do differently next time?

I feel having a second artist or someone from Yorkshire Dance to support would improve the running of the sessions. This is so when the lead artist is running the Zoom the other person can assist with technical issues, observe the participants, and respond to any difficulties they notice. They would also be able to assist with the running of the session by helping with registers and technical issues such as playing music.

Having an external observer would improve any future Zoom related projects. Currently I feel the structure of my sessions feels very strong and positive, but this is coming from my own perspective. The only way to properly review the success of the project would be to have an outside eye like a Dementia Care Mapper in the room to evaluate. I wouldn't be able to improve the session without an evaluator to observe and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the sessions. When care homes open up it is worth evaluating in this way so this data exists for future projects.

Other ways to improve the session would be to use a mini portable lighting system.) My camera could also be improved - this could be something to explore and experiment with. Purchasing a wide angled Wi-Fi camera or learning the skills to connect a DSLR camera to a laptop.

Having resources for care staff to help them to use Zoom for the first time. This could be a PDF booklet or a short video to introduce them to the technology and give advice on how to run a smooth session from their end. Although the homes did get into the sessions eventually these resources could speed up the process.

I think offering a (Zoom) workshop for staff members would be incredibly useful. This workshop could give them the ideas to help assist during the sessions, give them confidence, and give them the tools to observe and react in real time to get the most out of the participants. This would make the experience between care homes more consistent.

Q: What are your key learning points:

- The potential of Zoom in care home settings. That if it is done right it can be a successful new way of reaching isolated / vulnerable people in care homes.
- Introducing the idea of being digitally sociable. Care homes could communicate to one another over the sessions and it gave a sense of unity, even though we were all taking part in different areas.
- An external evaluator is required in the room to close the evaluation gap.
- Have two artists delivering or a lead artist with an assistant supporting with technical issues.
- Explore resources to help care homes get online for the first time.

Q: What did care home staff and residents think about the Zoom sessions?

Here are some quotes from care home staff and partners:

“Ellen, you are so good at getting all to join in and you are always smiling” - Care Delivery hub

“Hi from North West Recovery hub. We have had lots of residents who have participated in these dance sessions and have really enjoyed them. Everyone has looked forward to the sessions each week. We will all miss your fabulous dance sessions Ellen. Would be fantastic if you could do more online dance sessions. Everyone says thank you so very much. I know the East Recovery Hub has someone come in from Yorkshire Dance each week to do a face-to-face dance session and would be great if something similar could be arranged for the North West Recovery Hub.” - North West Recovery Hub

“Wonderful sessions. Our customers have really enjoyed them. Your [Ellen] enthusiasm is infectious” - Wykebeck Care home

Thanks to Ellen for sharing her reflections and experiences.



Time to Shine: a Leeds Older People's Forum programme