



In Mature Company: Dance in care homes

Time to Shine end of project report
March 2022

Leeds
Older
People's
Forum

Time to
Shine

YORKSHIRE
DANCE

 **COMMUNITY
FUND**

Summary

In Mature Company was a dance project run by [Yorkshire Dance](#). It developed out of their work on [Young at Arts](#), a previous Time to Shine project. The team at Yorkshire Dance wanted to work with care home residents to explore the role of emotional or platonic touch (as opposed to functional touch such as medical appointments or haircuts) in building friendships and reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness. Dance creates opportunities for platonic touch, such as hand holding between residents, in a safe environment. The team at Yorkshire Dance were also interested in trialling [Dementia Care Mapping™](#) as a way of discreetly evaluating the effect of the activities on those who took part.

In Mature Company initially used teams of artists (one dancer, one musician) to deliver two ten-week creative interventions each year in three care homes across Leeds. The visits were observed and recorded by two Yorkshire Dance staff who had trained as Dementia Care Mappers. These observations were used to reflect on, and adapt, practice within the project.

The closure of care homes during the Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected the project's work in 2020. The team used this time for research, finding alternative ways to deliver the project and for creating valuable dissemination tools. Time to Shine funding for a fourth year (until March 2022) then enabled them to trial and assess different techniques.

Yorkshire Dance was successful in obtaining follow-on funding from the NHS to continue their creative work in care homes from April 2022 onwards.

In Mature Company in numbers

- 534 people took part in In Mature Company between 2018 and 2022, with 278 older people participating regularly
- Demographic data was collected for 270 people:
 - » 92% were of White British heritage
 - » 4% were of Irish / Irish Traveller / Gypsy / Other White heritage
 - » 2% were of Asian / Asian UK heritage
 - » 1% were of Black African / Caribbean / Black UK heritage
 - » 1% were of Other Ethnic heritage
 - » 27% identified as male
- In Mature Company was supported by 16 older volunteers (aged 50 and older) and 2 younger volunteers (aged under 49)
- 25 documents were written to share the project's learning and experiences, including case studies, test and learn case studies, Dementia Care Mapping reports and project reflections
- 5 'Dancing and Dementia' podcasts were produced
- 1 'Dancing the Small Moments' animation was produced

Ethos

The project focussed on the effect of platonic touch. Older people in care homes, especially those without family close by, often receive very little touch unrelated to care. Dance can be a natural way to touch others and Yorkshire Dance was interested in exploring the effects of touch on wellbeing.

Co-production with people with dementia at the planning stage had proved particularly difficult during the Young at Arts project. As a result the In Mature Company approach was to use an experienced dance artist and a musician to enable co-production with residents during sessions, as well as consulting with family and care home staff. Thus residents were able to influence the sessions as they happened.

The Young at Arts project demonstrated that it was almost impossible to undertake meaningful evaluation with older people living with dementia. This was due to a lack of mental capacity to consent to take part, or a lack of self-awareness. Following their experience of working with a Dementia Care Mapper on a project in Sheffield, Yorkshire Dance trained two staff in Dementia Care Mapping™ and they were able to observe sessions. Dementia Care Mapping™ was devised for use in care settings to enable staff to provide person-centred support. There are two excellent reports, [Year 1](#) and [Year 2](#), detailing how it worked, the results and how In Mature Company was able to use the information generated to help to improve delivery.

Activities

Dance sessions involved an experienced dance artist and a musician working with a group of older people, volunteers, care home staff and family members in a range of ways. Sessions were not 'dances' as such; most, though not all, residents were seated. This [short film](#), produced for BBC Yorkshire, gives a flavour of the approach. Sessions generally had a theme and used props although these could be changed in response to the residents' responses. Creative movement might involve hand holding, mirroring, swaying to the music, using musical instruments to follow a rhythm or accompany spoken word. Sessions were very interactive.

There were three key questions that Yorkshire Dance planned to answer from the observations made during the activity sessions:

- Does platonic or emotional touch in dance sessions have an impact on the wellbeing of care home residents?
- How does the frequency of dance sessions increase impact and engagement with people with dementia?
- Is it possible to engage the more socially-isolated residents through a 'pathway approach' which involves leading them from sessions delivered in their own rooms, to small group sessions and then finally larger group sessions?

Initially In Mature Company planned to tackle each of these questions separately through different stages of the project. However, as they began their first year with research into touch, they started to find answers for the other two research questions. For instance, the team found



that the positive impact on wellbeing that participants experienced during the sessions began to reduce after the session ended. The conclusion that more frequent creative sessions would benefit all residents is a simple one. Realistically, the model of delivery might need some thought to take into account financial constraints or the availability of care home staff to support the sessions.

Originally the team planned to deliver creative activities through a combination of larger groups, smaller groups, and one-to-one sessions. Establishing smaller groups in some care homes was a challenge. When working with care homes that have limited funding for external activities, staff understandably want as many residents as possible in the group sessions otherwise they feel like they are leaving people out.

In Mature Company did some valuable work one-to-one with a small number of residents who were unable to join group sessions. The learning from this work was documented in [Dance Diaries](#). The dance artist, Ellen Turner, was able to form a good relationship with the individuals she supported, and created individual Dance Diaries to inform their family and caregivers. Spending time with older people over 10 weeks meant that Ellen was able to learn to communicate effectively and had time to learn what music people loved and responded to. Their physical and mental wellbeing was visibly improved. Care homes made small interventions, like providing appropriate music, when they knew what effect this could have. For the individuals the diary formed a record of stimuli they enjoyed and could be supported to continue and Ellen was able to offer support and training to care home staff.

Yorkshire Dance took full advantage of Time to Shine's focus on a test and learn approach. They engaged their teams in regular conversations each quarter and delivery was altered as a result of feedback from the Dementia Care mapping™. Yorkshire Dance also realised that they needed to change the way they mapped sessions to improve the value of the results. It became clear that it was not possible to map the effect on every resident, and that it could be valuable to follow regular attendees over time to observe changes that occurred.

The work of In Mature Company was written up at each stage and also shared in animations and podcasts. Kirsty Arnold, one of the In Mature Company dance artists, wrote a rich and reflective piece of writing on the different people she worked with and how it had felt to be an artist on the programme. This insight was used in [Dancing the Small Moments](#), an animated short film, to disseminate the findings in a different format to a written report.



Project adaptations following lockdowns and pandemic responses

“Everything changed with the Covid-19 pandemic – with care homes in crisis, residents at their most vulnerable and staff exhausted. The many challenges of the past year have made us look afresh at what we do and how we do it. We have had to reimagine how and what we could deliver and how best to support care homes, residents and staff”

Yorkshire Dance staff member

During the initial lockdown the project had to stop delivery. Year 3 of the project was, in effect, postponed for an entire year, although the team produced a [series of podcasts](#) which had been in production early in 2020, and in summer they were able to hold some sessions in care home gardens. These were outdoor, socially-distanced creative sessions. Unsure how to deliver sessions without touch, the artists excelled by using their creativity and inventiveness.

“Residents who would normally not engage or be involved were dancing away to the music and what we noticed was that the residents were interacting with each other too, which was very special and not a normal occurrence.”

Leeds care home staff member

Summer 2021 saw In Mature Company delivering outdoor sessions with four Leeds care homes and bringing the joy of dancing and moving to new communities.

Then, in partnership with Leeds Care Delivery team, In Mature Company ran weekly [Zoom sessions for 10 care homes/day centres](#). This allowed staff and residents in different homes to connect and share in a joyful experience with each other.

They focused research on creating a more collaborative, and more sustainable model for the sector, as they had already learned that delivering more in-person sessions more often is not realistic given the financial constraints of most care homes.

Zoom sessions involving multiple care homes grew steadily in popularity as staff learned to use the technology and saw the effect on residents. Staff now had a different way of connecting regularly with their peers across the city through a fun activity rather than serious meetings. As a result, staff reported their own enjoyment of the sessions which led to staff engaging with the work in new ways.

“Everyone would miss not having the sessions and would love them back. Service users could have danced all day and night, they say. I also think it is a really lovely, interactive and helpful session and have enjoyed taking part in it myself. It gets everyone involved and has a really positive impact.”

Comments from a care home worker

Legacy

The effectiveness of the online work during 2021 meant that Yorkshire Dance was well-positioned to secure NHS funding for 3 years from April 2022. This new project aims to:

- identify care homes which are harder to engage, would benefit from the programme and have not yet taken part in In Mature Company.
- develop the evidence base around falls prevention and improved sleep patterns alongside reducing isolation and loneliness.
- train new artists to work with people living with dementia
- train care staff to support creative sessions.

Working as part of the wider Time to Shine programme has also changed the way Yorkshire Dance works with older people. Being part of a test and learn programme has changed the way the team thinks about planning, funding and sharing learning and this is covered in more detail in an excellent [blog written for the Centre for Cultural Value](#).

Learning

- Working in an interactive way with an dance artist and musician did improve wellbeing
- Working in small groups was very effective, but in the long run this is unlikely to be sustainable in many care homes
- It took a lot of negotiation to get the right space and right time for sessions. For example, in some care homes the residents lounge was also a thoroughfare and this led to distraction. Sessions after lunch meant that more people fell asleep
- Furniture can cause issues - for example wingback chairs changed the dynamics of a group as residents couldn't easily see each other
- The degree of involvement of care home staff varied but as they became more involved they recognised the difference the sessions made and became more committed to them. This was particularly apparent once work had to go online and care home workers had to be the 'touch' element of dance



Case study

Margaret is a resident of a care home in Pudsey and was a regular participant in dance sessions during 2018. Compared to other residents Margaret can communicate and move more easily. Although she socialised with a small group of the residents, she felt less of a connection with many of the other residents who have later stage dementia. She explained: “I wasn’t so bad. Not like some people. I just had a bit of a breakdown and that.”

Her emotion and passion for the sessions was clearly visible. You only had to be in the space for a few minutes to see Margaret’s enthusiasm and love for music and dance: “It’s wonderful because it brings life. This dancing brings life to people, and the music... Thank you for coming. It’s wonderful. I just love it, I love it.”

The Dementia Care Mappers noted that Margaret was fully engaged in the sessions and this was having a positive impact on her wellbeing. Within the sessions, the artists used props such as ribbons and musical instruments to encourage residents to interact. Margaret often stood up and approached other residents, encouraging their engagement. The dance sessions were a space where she connected with the other residents that she didn’t normally talk to.

Margaret also noticed that the sessions were having an effect on herself and her fellow residents: “There is movement that [the residents] aren’t able to do anymore. [The sessions] encourage them to get back to where they were before... It’s the movement and it’s the feelings that help people. We are loved and well looked after but there was nothing moving, there was not much happening. [Now] I see people getting up singing and dancing and it gives them hope.”





Further reading

[Artist reflections: Creative sessions with care home residents during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

[Dance Diaries](#)

[Observations on attending a session at Seacroft Grange Care Home](#)

[Case study of the In Mature Company project](#) - University of Sheffield, April 2020

[Dancing and Dementia podcasts](#)

[Young at Arts: Reducing loneliness and social isolation through offering creative social opportunities](#) - University of Sheffield, July 2017

Contact us

To contact Yorkshire Dance visit <https://yorkshiredance.com/>

Leeds Older People's Forum Joseph's Well, Suite C24 Leeds LS3 1AB

 0113 2441697

 hello@opforum.org.uk

 www.opforum.org.uk

 [@LeedsOPF](https://twitter.com/LeedsOPF)

 facebook.com/leedsolderpeoplesforum