

## **Rashid & Saba's Story | Dancing Together**



Rashid, aged 73, has always been an active and independent person. He enjoys exercising, watching cricket, and watching musicals with his wife, Saba. Since developing dementia, however, he has found it difficult to maintain his independence and social life.

Rashid and Saba have been attending Yorkshire Dance's pilot project, *Dancing Together*. The project brings people living with dementia and their carers together through dance and music. Rashid now attends the sessions regularly, travelling independently on the access bus - a huge step in regaining his confidence.

"The best thing about this group is the people," Rashid says. Although he doesn't consider himself a dancer, he smiles and waves at Saba, saying, "I'm not a dancer, but my wife is... and I can *move*." He particularly enjoys using the instruments, adding, "The music is great - Barry White is my favourite, and Johnny Cash!"

For Saba, the sessions have made a difference to both their lives. “He has no social life anymore since losing his independence. Now we’ve found this group, he is really benefiting,” she explains. “He struggles to be away from me, so this group has really helped both of us.”

She has also seen a change in Rashid’s confidence. “He comes home and tells me about all the people he’s met. He even phones me during the sessions in excitement to tell me that they’re doing the dancing and music.” She laughs as she adds, “He never ever used to dance, but now I catch him dancing with our grandkids, and he loves it!”

Beyond the music and movement, Rashid has found a sense of belonging. “He feels comfortable now as he’s learnt everyone’s name. He loves to help people and has started making their teas at the beginning of each session,” Saba shares. “It’s lovely that he takes part as he’s overcoming his barriers. Rashid is usually quite reserved, but now he comes home saying, ‘*They had us up dancing today!*’ The social aspect is the most important part of this.”

*Dancing Together* has also unlocked memories between them. “It has helped him to remember all the music that he used to listen to,” Saba says. “Research shows that listening to music can trigger memories, and it’s true! Each week he comes home and reminisces about old musicals that we’ve watched together. It’s been lovely to remember these happy times.”

For Rashid and Saba, *Dancing Together* has been very important. “We need more culturally appropriate groups like this,” Saba emphasises. “They’re difficult to find. It took us years to find a group, now we finally have, and he loves it.”



# YORKSHIRE DANCE

## Denise & Doug's Story | Dancing Together



Denise and Doug are Dancing Together's resident ballroom dancers. Having spent years waltzing, quickstepping, and cha-cha-ing, they now show us how it's done at the *Dancing Together* sessions at OPAL.

"It's something that we look forward to coming to," says Denise. "And all the dance artists are lovely and lead us into exercise that keep us fit and healthy." She attends the session with her husband Doug who is living with dementia.

For Doug, who takes pride in being our 'class clown', "Making friends is what it's all about, and having a laugh as well!"

The couple's love of dance began years ago, "We used to go dancing a lot to practice," Denise recalls. "Then we decided to start doing medal tests, so we had private lessons." Doug chimes in: "Waltz, Quickstep, Cha Cha Cha, Rumba, Tango... we've done all the dances!". The pair proudly brought in their trophies and medals this week to share with the group.

Although they don't dance competitively anymore, the *Dancing Together* sessions allow them to keep up their passion. "It's good to do something like this," Denise says. "It keeps our bodies moving." Doug agrees: "That's the main thing - keep the body moving all the time."

Beyond the dancing, they both say that the social aspect is a huge part of why they attend. “It’s a social gathering besides just a dance thing,” Denise explains. “We get to know other people. She speaks fondly of OPAL, “Since he was diagnosed with his dementia, it’s helped us in loads of ways. If it hadn’t been for OPAL we wouldn’t have been able to meet you.”

“On a Monday, we’re all sat around the table talking about our lives - what we did when we were younger, where we went to school, what type of housing we lived in. There’s always something to learn, and that’s what it’s all about.” Doug taps his head and smiles, “Keeps the brain going... and you keep dreaming - especially when you’re dancing!”

Music has always played a huge role in Doug’s life. “Music-wise, I’ve done it all from Rock and Roll to Skiffle. I used to play piano. I’ve got a guitar at home, got a banjo - I’ve got it all. Music has been my life.” He grins as he recalls hearing Lonnie Donegan’s *My Old Man’s a Dustman* played at the beginning of the session. “That took me right back!”

Denise loves the song choices too. “The music’s lovely because they play things for our generation - songs we know.” She and Doug still enjoy live music, with tickets to see an Elvis tribute at Bibi’s. “Oh yes, I’m an Elvis fan!” Doug exclaims.

For both of them, *Dancing Together* has become the “highlight of their week”. “It’s just something to look forward to,” Denise says. “Monday, you get up and think, *yay, we’re going there today!*” Doug nods in agreement.

The only downside? “We’re sad when it’s finished.”



Special thanks to dance artists Eleni Green and Inari Hulkkonen.

## Brenda & Joe's Story | Dancing Together



Brenda and Joe have been joining in with *Dancing Together*, bringing their warmth and humour to each session. At 88, they enjoy socialising as a couple and the challenge of trying something new and suitable for them both.

Brenda has always loved dancing. Growing up in St Helens, she would go dancing regularly before moving to Huddersfield, where nights at the local band room became routine for a Friday evening. She did it all, “Bopping and jiving and everything like that.”

Joe, however, hadn't had much dance experience before *Dancing Together*. “That's something new for me, but I enjoy it!”

Brenda and Joe met in a pub in Leeds, when she and her friends ended up sitting with him and his friends. “His friend asked me if I'd go out with him (Joe) the following Saturday,” Brenda laughs. They did, and they've been by each other's side ever since.

Despite Brenda's love for dancing, they never danced together back then. Now, at *Dancing Together*, Joe's favourite dance style is simple - “Dancing together with Brenda. Not on my own!”

Music plays a big role in their enjoyment of the sessions. Joe says “I don't have a best song, I like them all! I like *Moon River* they play it in this dance class.” Brenda smiles and agrees.

For Brenda and Joe, *Dancing Together* is about more than movement. “It's a laugh,” Brenda says. “It's something positive for us to do. I enjoy the company, I enjoy learning to dance again. I can't do too much at the moment with my bad arm, but I enjoy watching the others and listening to the music.”

Joe adds, “I like coming here. It gets us out. You're doing something you wouldn't normally do - that's what I like most.”

# YORKSHIRE DANCE

## Husna & Emad's Story | Dancing Together

Thursday 27th February 2025



Since joining *Dancing Together*, Husna and Emad have discovered a new way to stay active and social. Emad, who has been diagnosed with dementia, enjoys the sessions, even if he jokes, he's "not good at these things!"

Although they have both danced a long time ago, they've embraced the sessions with enthusiasm. "The dancing is very good," Husna says. "We try to do the same movements at home". She appreciates the warmth of the sessions, adding, "The girls show us with smiles on their faces, it's infectious! It makes us want to smile too."

Emad, a former international hockey player, has noticed a connection between his favourite sport and dancing. "Hockey is very fast. You have to move fast when dancing as well."

Both retired GPs, Husna and Emad understand the importance of staying physically active. "Being doctors, with experience of over 50 years in this country, we know that movement has such an impact on physical health," Husna says. "The dancing is very good because, for the time you are here, we are happy."

Beyond the physical benefits, they both enjoy the sense of community within the group.

“We like coming here together,” Emad says. “It’s not just a lot of talk, there are shared ideas which are useful.” Husna explains, “We have got one common goal, and that is we have to keep going. We have formed this friendship. We can let our personality be seen and not feel embarrassed about it, even when we’re dancing!”



After nearly 57 years of marriage, Husna and Emad have experienced life to the full and share a beautiful motto:

*“Whatever you’ve got, be grateful and celebrate... and dance!”* Husna says with a smile.

For them, *Dancing Together* is a time to move, laugh, and share something new - proving that it’s never too late to start dancing!

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With thanks to Yorkshire Dance, Dancing Together participants and Dance Artists for sharing these stories as part of their Creative Healthy Ageing project.

Creative Healthy Ageing is a partnership between Leeds Older People’s Forum and The Performance Ensemble, funded by Public Health (Leeds City Council). Testing out different ways of delivering ‘healthy ageing’ messages, the aim is to develop effective community-based engagement methods to inform a fresh, city-wide approach to Public Health messaging using creative expression.

