

DANCE
Reading



Reading
Place of Culture

Dance and Mental Health Commission

October 2019 - June 2021

Introduction to project

Sport in Mind the award-winning mental health, sport and exercise charity worked in partnership with Dance Reading, an arts charity who work with internationally acclaimed dance artists and local dance practitioners to deliver community projects and public performances, and Becoming Mums a peer to peer support group for people who identify as mothers.

Together this partnership built a strong programme of work to create strategic step change in Reading for dance and mental health. Core strands of work included, upskilling the dance sector in mental health, ensuring a new skill set was embedded and accessible across the town to create a sustainable programme legacy. The other strands included a series of activities in the community. These were carefully designed bespoke sessions for mums and babies and toddlers and accessible community dance sessions. There was also the intention of delivering in Prospect Park Hospital for in-patients, however Covid-19 restricted this development. There was also a focus on digital media and bringing sessions to life to breakdown barriers for people accessing the sessions

The challenges

Covid-19 really stalled the delivery of in-person sessions, which delayed our delivery timelines. We developed Movement Invitations, which included several 5-10 minute tutorial from Mafe, our dance practitioner for people to watch and follow in a downloadable format. We also delivered a dance and movement course online in the winter months, although this didn't attract high numbers but it did enable four participants to have one to one sessions with the dance facilitator, a truly unique experience.

All sessions were outside for delivering in person and sometimes the weather would reduce number engagement, especially the mum sessions because of the babies. Outdoor facilities are a problem in Christchurch Meadows, where even now the public toilet is still unavailable.



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**MUM & BABY
MOVEMENT**

**Wednesdays 11am-12pm
Christchurch Meadow**

info@sportinmind.org

Quotes

“This is my favorite part of the week”

Mum and baby dance participant

“I am a really shy, insecure person but this class has helped me so much”

Mum and baby dance participant

“The dance session makes me more present in the moment and take care of my body”

Mum and baby dance participant

“I love to dance, and I love the routines”

Participant Community Dance

"It's very easy to feel isolated and down (especially with the lockdown and restrictions) when having a baby which is what these classes are really helping with. I feel more motivated, positive and able to deal with what the rest of the week brings"

Mum and baby dance participant



DANCE
Reading

Becoming
Mums

Sport In Mind

Quotes

“The two day Mental Health First Aid Course really helped me understand children and young peoples mental health, as well as my own”

Dance Practitioner/Mental Health First Aider



“I will definitely be using this training in my dance school, I feel I can open the conversation about mental health now”

Dance Practitioner/Mental Health First Aider

"The course really made me learn a lot about myself and how I can support other, great tutor too! Kelvin was so honest and approachable"

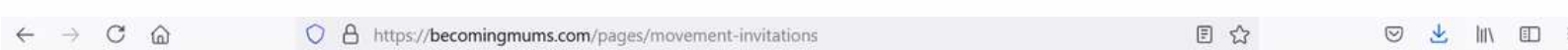
Dance Practitioner/Mental Health First Aider

Programme Data

12 Dance practitioners from various dance genres completed the Mental Health First Aid 2 day course for children and young people.

As apart of Dance Readings Digital Festival a short 3 hour Mental Health first Aid Course was delivered with **15** dance practitioners engaged.

Mum and baby/toddler class as part of Dance Reading festival saw **25** mums and babies participate across 3 classes. Participants to the outdoor sessions in summer 2020 and spring 2021 totalled **21**, but not all participants attended every session, they are designed to work as a course of 6 classes, but are flexible to allow the very real pressures on parents with young children. The online classes saw **4** participants receive 4 weeks of one to one sessions, and the Movement Invitations Online have been advertised widely, with scope to do more.



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Movement Invitations

Invitations to movement, relax

Programme Data Continued...

The Community Dance session has run for 4 weeks with a of interest from Community Mental Health Teams and Social Prescribers. The classes are up beat, fun an new routine it taught every week allowing the session to be drop in. The participants vary and are slowly building each week.

One participant with enduring long-term mental health problems has been present every week and has even made dance video and edited them from the moves taught in class. Another participant watched from the side for three weeks until recently joining in. 5 new participants also recently joined and loved the session, showing great interest at carrying on



Programme Data Continued...

12 Sport in Mind Journals were provided to the Mum participants at the end of the Spring 2021 course. The journals are a self-help tool that helps people become more active for their mental well being and create healthy life habits. The journal is jam-packed with activities, such as physical activity tracker, five ways to well-being and colouring/doodle pages. Evaluation will be collected in 4 weeks to feedback on impact.



Social Media

To break down barriers of engagement the partnership invested in social and digital media assessments. This included interactive videos, interviews and photos.



Key Success

- Strong working relationship between all partners
- Increased opportunities for dance and mental health activities in Reading
- Improved mental well-being for participants
- Up-skilled dance sector in mental health
- New referral partners e.g. perinatal mental health teams and Children Centres
- Participants overcoming massive barriers to engage in sessions
- Nurturing and safe environment for all
- Providing support despite a global pandemic



Evaluation

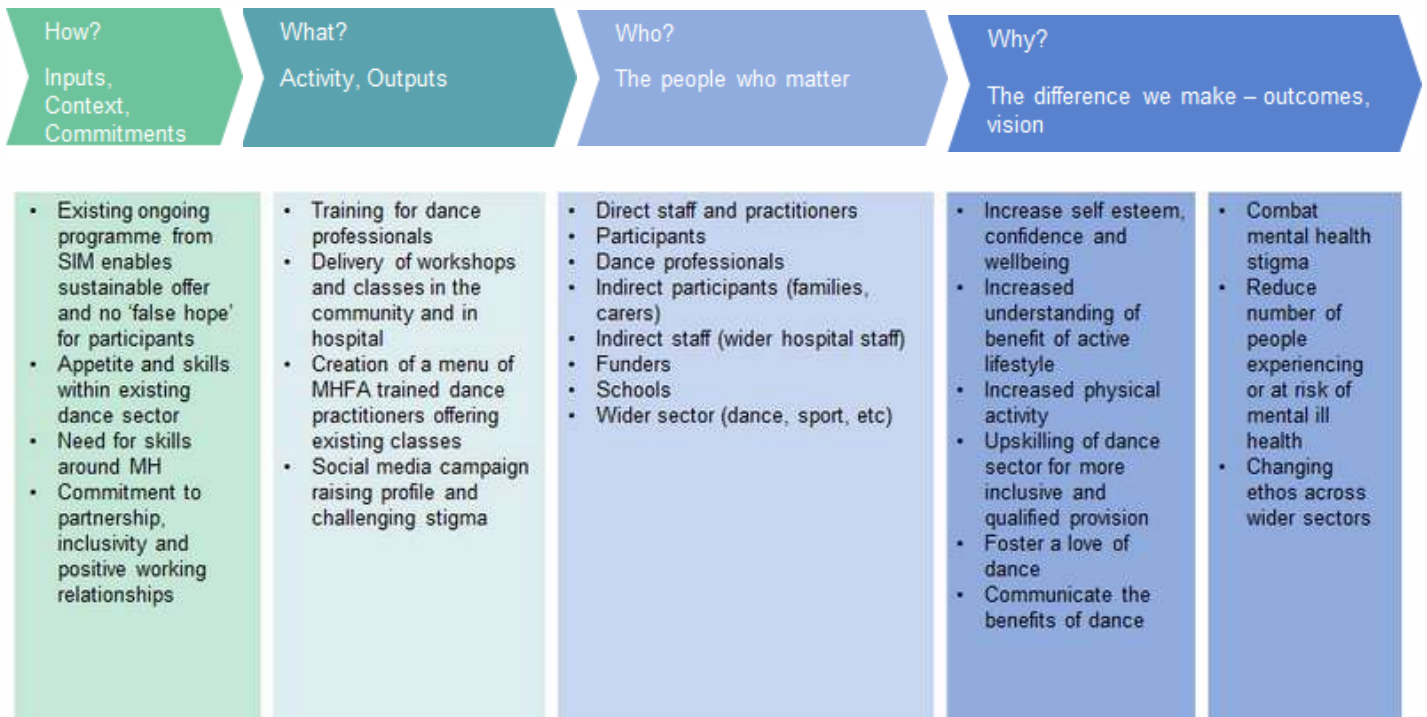
Covid-19 impacted disproportionately across communities. Those most affected included people with mental problems, new mothers and BAME communities. This programme ran before and during lockdown and as the programme developed, the participants' mental health needs became more acute. Participants' mental health conditions included; Anxiety, Depression, Post Natal Depression (PND), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Bipolar, Schizophrenia, Asperger's, High Functioning Autism, Learning Disabilities and Dyspraxia.

This programme took a holistic approach and ensured all participants felt secure and safe in their environment. We also put a great deal of effort in following national guidelines of 'making every contact count'. Upon registering for the course, many participants would explain their mental health had deteriorated and needed some support. We would always respond with ensuring the participants felt welcomed and motivated to attend the sessions to get them that extra support.



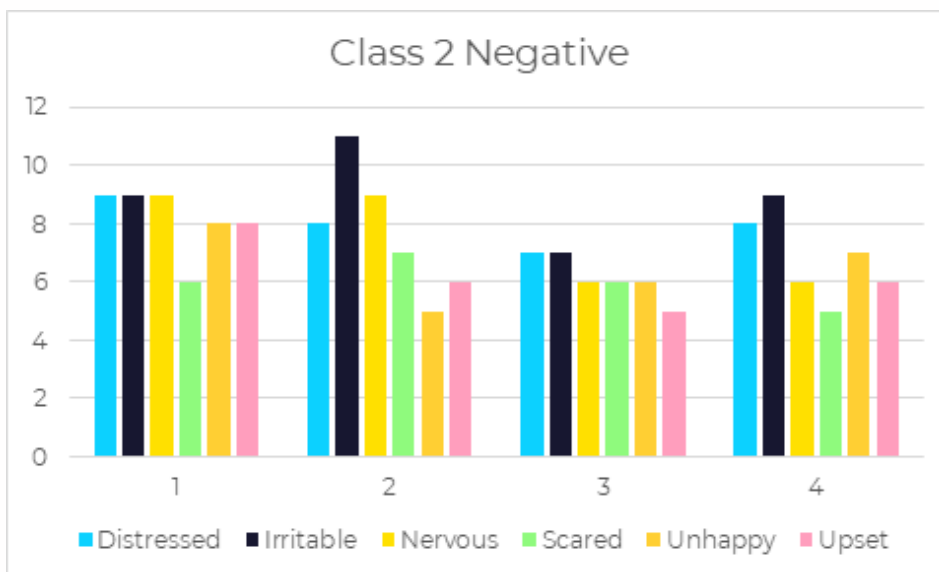
Evaluation Continued

To ensure we could evaluate impact of the sessions the planning stage was key with a lot of focus on evaluation, setting targets and writing a story of change (below).



Evaluation Continued

We used the UCL Wellbeing Umbrella, which we altered slightly, to measure changes of our whole cohort over the 6 weeks of each course. We are aware that 6 weeks of 1 hour classes is not enough time to have a lasting and meaningful impact, but we can see a trend towards the reduction of prevalence of negative responses, and a definite increase in the prevalence of certain positive responses too.



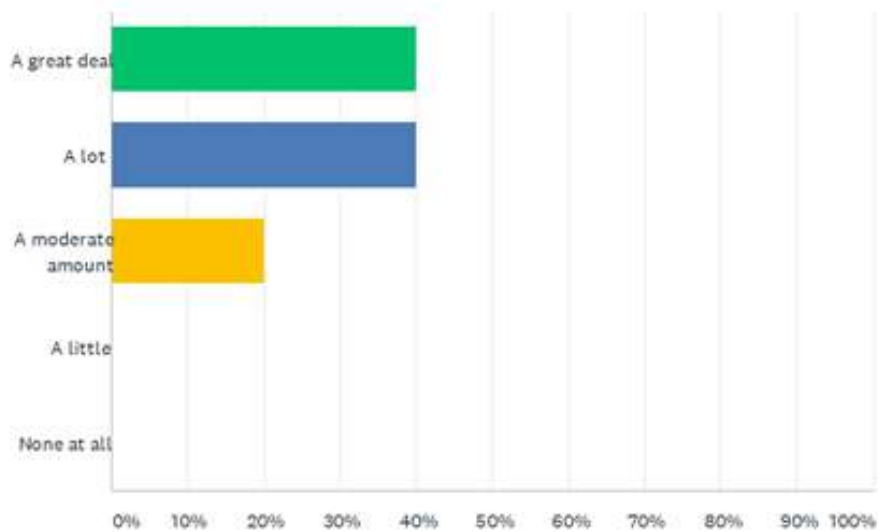
This chart shows the responses from week 2 to week 6. In this chart, participants assigned a number to a 'mood', with 5 being 'I feel extremely'; and 1 being 'I don't feel'. Therefore, we aim to see a decrease in score for the negative responses

Qualitative feedback was collected anonymously via survey monkey and that showed an overwhelmingly positive response from participants reflecting on the impact on their physical and mental health.

Evaluation Continued

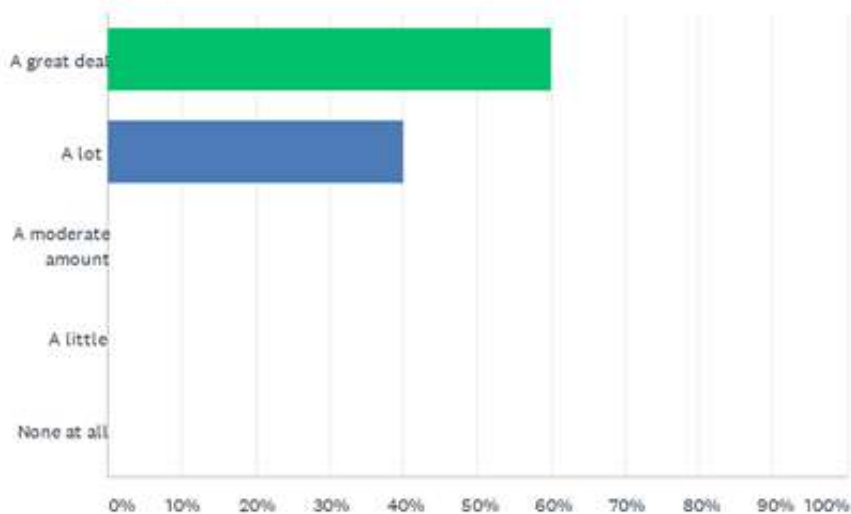
Q1 Do you feel these classes have had any impact on your physical health?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 0



Q3 Do you feel these classes have had any impact on your mental health?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 0



Since returning to outdoor working in 2021, we ran a 6 week course that was fully booked with 10 participants, and 6 of those have returned to the first session of the second 6 week block of classes. This retention and repeat attendance will better enable us to measure meaningful change, over a longer period of time.

Conclusion

- The choice of dance practitioner and style is vital
- We need longer term participation, over more weeks to measure impact
- The partnership between organisations was very successful
- Repeat attendance gives us more scope to measure change
- There is appetite for this, and participants report impact on mental and physical health
- Sessions being free and flexible are really important for mothers with young children
- New partners want to develop this programme further and engage wrap around services and opportunities to the participants

