

Dance Re:Ignite 3.0

An Evaluation for BEEE Creative CIO

By Kirsten Hutton



Photograph 1 - Dance Re:Ignite On Tour performance in a community setting

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October 2022

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Dance Re:Ignite 3.0 was a dance project for adults, specifically vulnerable & older adults, in Hertfordshire that took place from September 2021 to August 2022. Through Dance Re:Ignite 3.0 it planned to do this by investing in local dance infrastructure that included development for volunteers, practitioners and partnerships to maximise dance provision and the reach of dance to vulnerable local communities in Bishop's Stortford, Hemel Hempstead, Rickmansworth, Watford and St Albans/Welwyn Hatfield. This is the third iteration of the Dance Re:Ignite programme and focused on increasing reach through localised, place based approaches via commissions of co-created performance and workshop packages, tours across the 6 areas, micro events, streaming events, and development opportunities for local freelance practitioners.

Project Aims

This project had four overarching aims:

- Develop community dance infrastructure in Hertfordshire
- Increase feelings of wellbeing in participants through creative collaboration
- Test and explore barriers to engagement
- Develop artistic approaches to co-creating dance with communities

Headlines

- The project explored a new way of working at a hyper-local level which enabled a deeper level of connection with local community groups and development of dance artists in those areas.
- The project continues to support participants' all-round wellbeing as they continue to identify benefits that include feeling connected to others, being physically active, feeling valued and being creative
- Dance artists were supported to be stretched and challenged by working beyond their artform and by having support from other artists, as well as peer to peer support opportunities
- A model of co-creation between artists and participants is being developed and defined, that gives agency and ownership to the participants
- This project has catalysed the potential development of a range of cross-sector partnerships. In particular, the developing partnership with Vocal Eyes, that will benefit projects across the spectrum of BEEE Creative's work

Recommendations

Co-creation model with artists: The co-creation model explored provided clear outcomes around the development of the dance artists' practice and confidence. It is recommended that a definition of co-creation and support for participants and artists are developed and explored in future iterations of the work so that a model can be refined, and best practice shared.

Participants as ambassadors Participants were enabled to take on a more ambassadorial role within the project. Further exploration is needed to understand if and how participants can be given responsibility to be ambassadors for the work to support encouraging more people to take part in dance activity.

Explaining the project to the not yet engaged It is recommended that further work is done, with participants, on working on how to describe and define the project, and to test further ways to encourage the not yet engaged to cross the threshold.

Development of partnerships This project saw a large increase in connection with community settings. It is recommended to review the connections made and develop criteria for ideal community partners, and then identify which of them would be of benefit to develop deeper working relationships with, so that these partnerships are in place for future work.

Participant feedback It is recommended that all team members working directly with participants remind them the importance of taking part in evaluation, while being mindful that evaluation participation is voluntary. It is recommended that a review of how and when the follow up activities are done are reviewed so that participants and artists are best able to complete the evaluation.

Introduction

Dance Re:Ignite 3.0 was a dance project for adults, specifically vulnerable & older adults, in Hertfordshire that took place from September 2021 to August 2022. BEEE Creative's aim is that all adults have the opportunity to create dance and enjoy the associated benefits; skills development, increased sense of belonging and enjoyment that impacts on sense of wellbeing. Through Dance Re:Ignite 3.0 it planned to do this by investing in local dance infrastructure that included development for volunteers, practitioners and partnerships to maximise dance provision and the reach of dance to vulnerable local communities in Bishop's Stortford, Hemel Hempstead, Rickmansworth, Watford and St Albans/Welwyn Hatfield.

This is the third iteration of the Dance Re:Ignite programme. Its development was driven by the evidence of the previous iterations of the positive impact shared collaborative dance engagement has on peoples' lives and that contributing to an artistic product increases confidence, self-esteem and pride. It supports BEEE Creative's organisational priorities of:

- Being a producer of highly regarded community dance activity
- An organisation rooted in the community
- A catalyst to release potential for individuals to thrive

Dance Re:Ignite 3.0 focused on increasing reach through localised, place based approaches via commissions of co-created performance and workshop packages, tours across the 6 areas, micro events, streaming events, and development opportunities for local freelance practitioners.

Aims and Outcomes

BEEE Creative's aim is that all adults have the opportunity to create dance and enjoy the associated benefits; skills development, increased sense of belonging and enjoyment that impacts on sense of wellbeing. It aims to challenge the way it co-creates dance with local communities to build on giving participants agency over what is created and how. The project had the following aims:

Aim: Develop community dance infrastructure in Hertfordshire

Outcomes:

1. Practitioners learn new skills in co-creating dance with local communities
2. Practitioners develop supportive relationships with each other
3. Participants learn new skills in dance, performance, co-leading
4. Participants are empowered to become ambassadors for the work
5. Cross-sector partnerships are developed

Aim: Increase feelings of wellbeing in participants through creative collaboration

Outcomes:

1. Participants identify increased feelings of worth and ownership, and feeling active
2. Participants will make new connections and strengthen established connections

Aim: Test and explore barriers to engagement

Outcomes:

1. Increased reach of participants and audiences
2. Increased knowledge of how to support the 'not yet' engaged to become engaged
3. Participants and audience wish to take part in future community dance projects

Aim: Develop artistic approaches to co-creating dance with communities

Outcomes:

1. The model for local artists to develop practice within the commissioned work is further developed

Activity Strands

Commissioned Work

This strand had three parts:

- Collaboration with a story maker artist working alongside 5 local dance artists experienced in working with older people and vulnerable adults to use storytelling to facilitate a co-creative way of working with local communities
- Creative consolidation and reflection of the community stories back through dance, music and film with 5 groups, one for each area
- Resource materials developed to facilitate creativity in the home for wider audience engagement and storytelling and dance

Within this strand there were two sub-strands where it was anticipated that by delivering the above, the following would take place:

Volunteer performers/co-leaders

A development of BEEE Creative's practice was to enable participants to take a more active role in performing and co-leading workshops. This development continued, with participants being able to do more to connect others to the work. This took the form of supporting new participants and identifying and connecting to groups and settings in the community to tour the performance.

Local Practitioner Development

Continue to develop the dance practitioner network, supporting local dance artists to gain new skills and support each other, share ideas and feel more valued, as well as advancing their own creative practice. In turn dance artists supported the vision to increase access and reach of dance in their local community.

ON TOUR

Each of the volunteer dance groups toured to between 3 and 12 community venues each. In addition, there was a research and development element of broadcasting the work into homes, and delivering micro performances on doorsteps and gardens



Photograph 2 - Dance Re:ignite performance at Trestle Arts Base

Methodology

A range of simple tools was designed to best fit the participants, artists and the activities. Qualitative and quantitative data from participants, partners and practitioners was triangulated to provide a narrative of the project and used to assess the projected outcomes. The milestones for this evaluation, and the tools can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Outputs

Activity	Number of sessions	New Products
Films	0	4
Audio described films	0	3
Letter to next generation	0	1
Audio recording of letter to next generation	1	1
Original music pieces	0	5
Performances – in person	51	0
Performance – doorstep	10	0
Performance - broadcast	10	0
Performance Workshops	66	5
Storytelling workshops – artists	3	0
Total	141	19

Table 1 - Project Outputs

Links to the film outputs of the project can be found in [Appendix B – Film and Documentation](#). Unexpected outputs of the project can also be found in [Appendix B – Film and Documentation](#). These include links to three audio described films by Vocal Eyes (partnership development described in [Cross-sector partnership development](#)) and a letter to future generations and a final documentary which captures the process of developing the performance pieces for the tour, that should be viewed alongside the letter to future generations.

Reach

Local Dance Artists	9
Specialist Artists	9
Participants	750
Audience groups (live)	1032
Audience (online) ¹	274
Number of performances or exhibition days	146
Number of participation sessions	227
Total	2447

Table 2 - Project Reach

¹ Does not include audience figures or distribution of audio description films, which were not available at the time of writing

Project Partners

Project Team	Artists	Partners and Funders
BEEE Creative – Project Management	Christopher Hunt – Technologist responsible for online exhibition Adriana Potts – Dance Artist - lead artist with Adri Flow and Fitness in East Herts Dawn Hudson – Dance Artist – Lead artist for Trestle Arts Base Dance Now group in St Albans, plus Assistant Artist Laura Horn – Dance Artist - lead artist for New Connections in Watford Louise White – Dance Artist - lead artist with Dacorum Community Dance in Dacorum Rebecca Benford – Dance Artist - lead artist with Full of Life Dance in Three Rivers Clare Bellchambers – Lead artist with Saracens Foundation in Welwyn Hatfield Miranda Quinney – Storyteller Hanna Wroblewski – Dance mentor for local artists Simone Sistarelli – Music and Documentary production Simon Richardson – Photography Jane Hobson – Photography Spearhead Productions – Filming	East Herts District Council Dacorum Borough Council Three Rivers District Council Watford Borough Council The Victoria Wood Foundation Arts Council England Project Grants

Table 3 - Project Partners

Participants

For the purpose of this evaluation the term ‘participant’ requires definition as there are cross-overs where artists participate, participants perform and audience members take part. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, the following roles have been defined and will be referred as such throughout.

- Artists Practitioners – dance artists leading the sessions with the volunteer performers
- Participants – volunteers taking part in the commissions, devising the performance and touring the performance
- Audience – those in community settings watching the performances who may also take part in the workshop after the performance

Artists will be referred to by their specific artform.

What Happened

Previous iterations of Dance Re:Ignite found that a more localised approach was preferred by local artists and participants. Therefore, for this iteration the work focused on 6 areas of Hertfordshire: Dacorum, East Herts, St Albans, Three Rivers, Watford, and Welwyn Hatfield. These areas were identified as places where some dance infrastructure is in place, with potential for growth. The map below illustrates the breadth of the activities across Hertfordshire.

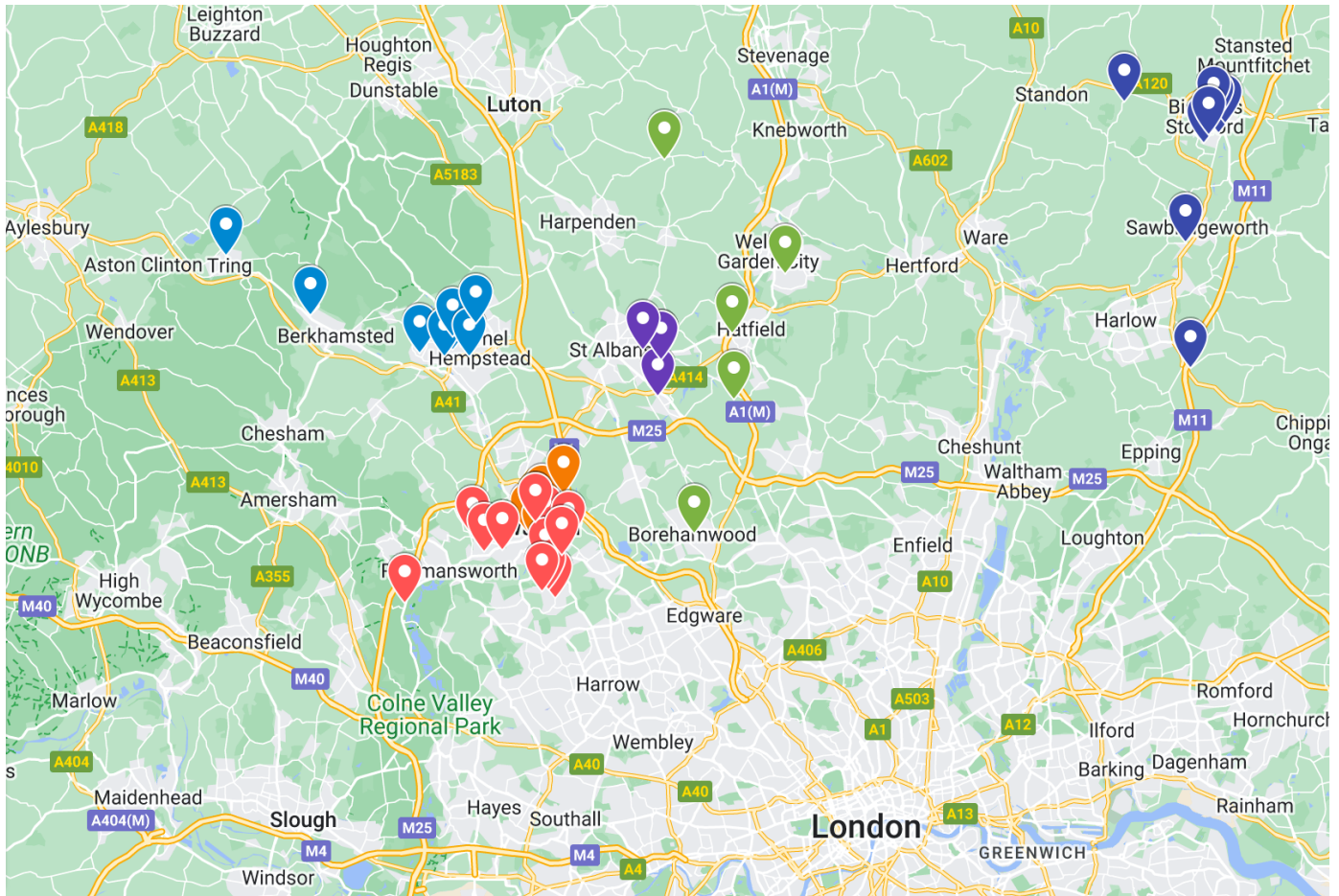


Figure 1 - Tour map of Hertfordshire

Six dance artists based in the six areas of Hertfordshire were identified to take part in storytelling workshops with a storytelling artist. The dance artists then used these skills with their own local group of participants who had volunteered to take part in the project. The storytelling practice was used as the basis of co-creating a dance performance, which was then toured to community settings in the six local areas of Hertfordshire.

The process of taking the local dance artists through storytelling training for them to use with their groups was one that provided new areas of learning and development for the dance artists and the participants.

Developing community dance infrastructure in Hertfordshire

Artist skills and practice development

Dance Re:Ignite 3.0 aimed to support the development of dance artists working on the project, so that they are able to take their new skills back into the communities in which they work. For most of the artists this was a very new way of working. The dance artists found the storytelling workshops enjoyable and supported new learning that they were able to weave into their own practice.

- *I learnt lots of techniques to prompt people into recalling and telling their stories along with some ideas to encourage people who didn't feel able to participate.*

- *How to establish a safe space, reassuring participants that they are in charge of how much they share and that their input will be valid and respected. How to listen without judgement or influence in the speaker's story.*
- *It was interesting to see how powerful the stories in other groups were where participants had chosen their own object to bring in.*
- *I learned that it's lovely to get to know more about people and maybe those times to sit together and share in different ways /in a different space can be an important part of a project*

One dance artist did comment that they would have benefitted from having more techniques for getting people talking, after using the stimulus.

- *We used several different kinds of stimuli to get people to recall their stories and some of the ideas were lovely and I could see myself using them. I did feel, however, that we only covered one technique for getting people to tell their stories and having them shared and I wondered whether there were different ways we could do this side of the storytelling.*

The storytelling workshops and subsequent co-creation sessions with their groups went deeper than just skills development. In their reflection logs the practitioners all described how this process has made them consider how they will develop their practice.

- *I think maybe to go deeper into finding out about people and their lives as part of a project is very valid and I will now think about that going forward.*
- *We talked about delving a bit deeper into stories, so I hope to do that - and find interesting and inspirational ways of validating and recording them. E.g. asking people to write words that not only state the facts of the story but also the feelings or themes around them*

All of the practitioners were nervous about applying their new storytelling skills with the groups they were working with. Some found it more challenging than others due to levels of confidence.

- *I found the whole leading my own storytelling workshop quite terrifying. It would have been nice to have another workshop with [the Storytelling artist] to look at leading our own to help us because my group did not want to do the storytelling.*
- *It was challenging the first time [I led the session]. I think by the third week I was confident enough to be able step out and go around and listen.*

One dance artist reflected that it had made them consider how to be more open in their practice, and not just aim for the final product.

- *I need to not worry about delivering the finished article to my groups - in all areas not just storytelling. So just because I'm not an experienced storytelling facilitator doesn't mean I shouldn't try it with a group, particularly if I know them well. As long as I offer it with open hands and a 'let's try it together attitude' we can give it a go. I often want to move away from top down delivery to a more cooperative approach in theory but I know I struggle to release control sometimes.*

Observations of another dance artist identified that they, by their own admission, was less experienced in inclusive practice but had been able to use the project to develop their skills in this area.

- *[Dance Artist] admits herself to be new to working more inclusively, as one of her dancers is in a wheelchair. She recognised that some of the instructions given for movement, may not have been best suited or as open as necessary, for all dancers to access and engage, and is making a conscious effort to adapt her approach to create a comfortable and welcoming environment for all.*

In a follow up session, it was observed

- *She recognised her skill in absorbing contributions from the participants, consolidating it and reflecting it back skilfully in the work they are creating - a sensitive interpretation of another's contribution into something they could all understand.*

Developing a model of artistic co-creation

A broader question about the nature of co-creation was raised through the process of the project. This was reflected on by the Project Lead, and what co-creation means and how it is applied within the context of a project like this. A core element of the project was to explore co-creation and how it impacts practice, and how it sits with the communities in which the project was being delivered. What was observed is that it is more complex than first imagined as each participant comes to the project with their individual needs and desires. As a project whose values place participants of the centre of the process, taking their needs and desires into account are paramount, which in turn impacts the co-creation process. The project lead reflected:

- *So for us co-production/creation at the moment seems to be about providing a space for our communities of older adults to come together and within that space their voices are heard. So if they don't want to be 'creative' then that is acknowledged and shouldn't be a barrier to still participating equally and their participation still equally valuable in the co-production process. Also, acknowledging the transactional value that everyone is learning and getting something out to the process - so the artist role in shaping and forming doesn't mean it isn't still co-production.*

The dance artists also found exploring the tensions that co-creation with community groups bring. Each artist is dedicated to the participant-led approach and facilitating their ownership of what they do and create. However, there is a tension of what is deemed as quality and how to define it. BEEE Creative's response to this is:

- *The 'quality/value' is the 'community empowerment' to create something together and our measure of success / progress will be how the participants and artists feel about this at the end of the process and if everyone feels they have been able to contribute - whether that is actively contributing or wanting to take a more recipient role - both equally valid if that desire has been heard and acknowledged.*

Another anticipated outcome of this work was to support the development of artist collaboration and peer support, that would strengthen local dance infrastructure. The initial storytelling workshops went some way to supporting this. The dance artists felt that the storytelling supported them getting to know each other better, and to connect with like-minded artists working in the same field.

- *It was good to find out more about other dance colleagues, brings us closer and you feel stronger as a team from the experience.*
- *It was great to work with like-minded practitioners from different experiences and practice.*

This led to some peer support between the dance artists. One example included one dance artist more experienced in inclusive practice, supporting a less experienced artist.

- *[Artist A] was able to support [Artist B] in suggestions for her best practice, with experience working inclusively with a diverse ability group for a long time. This developed artist collaboration and relationships further which was lovely to witness.*

There was however an expressed desire for more opportunity to connect throughout the project and to see each other's work. It was felt that this would have helped support them as they were all sharing the experiences of implementing the new storytelling skills into their practice.

- *It would have been nice to catch up with the other dance artists to see how their tours etc were going and swap notes. It might have been nice to stay behind afterwards, for example, or meet beforehand.*

Artists were further supported through training with the storytelling artist and individual mentoring support on the choreographic development with an established dance artist/choreographer. This was felt to be crucial by some of the dance artists, who were feeling the challenge of incorporating another artform – storytelling – into their practice.

- *Having the [Dance Artist/Choreographer] part has been really helpful to feed back with her...She's overseen our creative process and given ideas and help and support. Practitioners work in isolation*

so much that being able to share the nitty gritty of my sessions, having another creative brain on it has been so good – helpful to reflect on our practice.

The idea of feeling less isolated as a practitioner, through the support from the Storytelling Artist, Dance Artist/Choreographer, and others, was highlighted by another dance artist.

- *Artist confidence throughout a process - regular meetings, whether 1:1s with [Dance Artist/Choreographer], group meetings or visits from other artists are all useful in feelings less isolated as a freelancer, and to support with the creative process throughout.*



Photograph 3 - On Tour performance at a school in Dacorum

Peer to peer learning and support

In addition to the peer support that the dance artists were able to give each other, particularly at the start of the project, collaborating with other specialist artists was an element designed to support development. This included the storytelling artist, as well as the music artist and dance artist. Initially the specialist artists were commissioned to take on the artistic direction but as the project progressed it was clear that the artistic direction was being set by the co-creation process with participants. This changed the role of the commissioned artists to act more as mentors to the dance artists.

For most of the dance artists this was a new way of working and there were times when this caused some stress or anxiety due to its newness but ultimately was seen as a positive experience by all of the dance artists. This observation was made of by the Project Lead about one dance artist's experience.

- *[Dance Artist C] expressed excitement and added stress before reassurance, for working in a new way between movement and music. Usually, she would find a piece of music and choreograph to it, whereas now she is being asked to choreograph and explain the themes or feelings for [Music Artist] to compose something specific. This can add pressure of time to decide on things before maybe they naturally resolve creatively, but also adds elements of pleasant surprise when music suggestions fit nicely with the movement created.*

There was some feedback from some of the dance artists that the music did not necessarily work for the group. This may be partly due to the dance artists working in new ways with other artists and partly due to how the specialist artists are commissioned. While having external, non-local artists contributing can strengthen the project and expand the experience of the local artists, this requires further exploration to understand how best to use the specialist artists to support the co-creation process at a local level. The Project Lead reflected on this and whether greater external artistic input is needed.

- *It is something to explore further with the local artists - especially those that have worked on the previous Dance Re:Ignite commissions that have been more artist led. It would be interesting to see if a greater level of outside artistic contribution is preferred or not. From my perspective I feel the local talent creates a similar level of work from the participants themselves but is there something about groups and artists having others contribute... if we are looking at co-creation being equal exchange in the space - how much of the commission artists contribution was a help or hinderance to the local artists?*

The dance artists were asked if they felt the project enabled them to connect with each other, and therefore be able to offer each other support through the process. There were mixed responses to this. Initially, during the storytelling workshops, the dance artists did feel connected to each other and that they were going through a similar process. However, they felt less connected to each other when they went back to their local groups. For the more experienced dance artists this was less of a concern.

- *Personally, for me it's not important for this project. I don't need to feel connected.*
- *I've done Dance Re:Ignite for the last two years. It's a matter of time. Connecting with them more wouldn't have impacted my process. It was nice to feel you are part of a bigger project, it's not just you.*

The dance artists less experienced in this type of work felt more isolated and would have liked to have had more connection.

- *There hasn't been as much connection as I would have liked. It's a large project, over the county, covid restrictions. There has been some connections but not as much as ideal for me.*

There were other digital methods put in place to enable the dance artists to feel more connected, such as a shared googledrive for them to share their progress and experiences. This was also documented visually using a dedicated padlet, that was also shared with the participants.

- *The padlet has been popular with some of my dancers. That's been nice for them to see.*

Participant skills development

It was anticipated that the participants would also learn new skills by taking part in the project. Just over half of endpoint respondents (Fig.2) indicated that they had learned new skills. These skills included memory training, which for a number of the respondents was something they valued.

- *And having to remember a routine, it's very good for our memory and it's very good for our whole mental physical memory? So that would be one thing that I think should be really emphasised because I think it's worth investing in.*
- *Lots of people talk about the experience and the marrying of physical and mental together and actually how that supports maintaining memory that kind of stuff.*
- *Yes, the project gave me space to re-discover and grow my visualisation skills.*

Participants also felt the project had developed their workshop delivery skills. While some felt less interested in developing these skills, others valued the opportunity this presented, in developing confidence and resilience across the project.

- *I've benefitted from the co- leading of the workshops as we're able to support each other while we're doing it. It also helps you to cope with the more daunting aspects of the tour such as needing to adapt the workshop for each different group*

Another pillar to the development of dance infrastructure was to enable the participants to become ambassadors for the work. This is still developing. The participants did encourage friends to take part. They also played an active role in recommending community settings to tour to and made those connections. This was described by the Project Lead:

- *The role of the volunteers - cannot stress enough how their role was so instrumental in getting people involved - from nominating groups in their community for us to go to visit (personal connections in their community), to demonstrating that 'anyone' can be involved.*

There is likely more that could be done to develop this. When asked at the endpoint (Fig.7) if they would like to be a project Ambassador on future projects 9 respondents selected “Completely agree” (5) or “Agree somewhat” (4). This would indicate that there is scope to develop what an Ambassador role might look like and how participants might undertake this on behalf of BEEE Creative.



Photograph 4 - Dance Re:Ignite On Tour performance in a community setting

Cross-sector partnership development

The final pillar in the aim to develop the dance infrastructure was to make and develop new cross-sector partnerships. The dance groups toured to 50 settings that ranged from residential care homes, hospice settings, a primary school, and FE college. This project enabled BEEE Creative to start partnership dialogue with a range of community partners as they were able to see the value of the offer. The settings were asked to complete a feedback questionnaire about the visit, of which 17 responses were returned. Overall, the response to the performance and workshop was positive.

- *It was well received and thoroughly enjoyed by all ages in the audiences. We promoted it as a multigenerational event and encouraged, grandparents, parents and children to attend.*
- *We thoroughly enjoyed the whole session. It was very inclusive, and the dancers were so friendly. They put everyone at ease and made it a very comfortable space for people to feel happy to express themselves.*
- *The Staff felt the dance group was very moving as the subject was love, and also very rousing as we had a little sing song and exercise session*

This response to the work in turn encouraged some of the settings to consider a longer-term relationship with BEEE Creative. Most indicated that they would be interested in working collaboratively in future.

- *Yes always keen to collaborate where possible*
- *Yes, 100%*

This question was followed up by a similar question, asking if they felt their setting would like to take part in its own dance activity. This was met with more hesitance from the respondents with some saying they would need to consult their service users to understand how they felt.

- *I would look into it if my members wanted to.*

Others felt the needs of their service users might preclude them from taking part in dedicated dance activity.

- *I cannot answer this question without knowing the detail of the dance activity and what it would involve.*

However, most were interested in considering it, despite potential barriers.

- *I think that might be difficult, but I would be interested in using dance as a form of exercise for the group, as the more forms of exercise we have, the better our health is.*
- *The groups we work with are versatile and are usually keen to try different experiences, so we are up for most things. Something outdoors, weather permitting, would be good.*
- *Yes, we would love someone to come and visit us for part of our This n That monthly social isolation group for local people, maybe a chair exercise session would be great.*

The settings found the performance and workshop to be high quality and professional.

- *Well organised and good communication from the Admin team. Dancers were professional and made good adaptations to the needs of the learners.*

They could see the benefit this kind of activity can have on their service users.

- *Your visit of course was very enjoyable and gave a valuable physical exercise to club members. I'm aware that what is good for the body is good for the brain and although I cannot measure any positive effects, observing members during and after the session I'm convinced everyone also benefited mentally from the experience.*

This feedback indicates that based on the experience of the settings that they would like to explore further opportunities for collaboration and partnership working. Based on the overall feedback from the settings who were more reticent about future working, this could be addressed through follow up dialogue about how best to meet the needs of those settings.

BEEE Creative has also used this project to start conversations with Vocal Eyes², a charity that supports blind and visually impaired people to access and experience arts and heritage. They have produced three audio described versions of the films produced for this project and are in discussions regarding collaborations on future projects.

Increase feelings of wellbeing in participants through creative collaboration

Participant expectations

The participants were asked to complete baseline and follow up questionnaires that asked about their expectations, feelings of creativity and general wellbeing. Due to the very small numbers of the groups the sample sizes are very small. The sample size at baseline is twice the size of the sample received at endpoint. Therefore, midpoint and follow up focus group sessions were run with participants to triangulate the feedback from the questionnaires.

The participants were asked at the start of the project what they were hoping to take away from taking part. The choices offered were based on indicators of wellbeing such as feeling connected, learning skills, being active, engaging in enjoyable activities, and being creative. They were asked again at the endpoint if those expectations had been met.

² <https://vocaleyeyes.co.uk/>

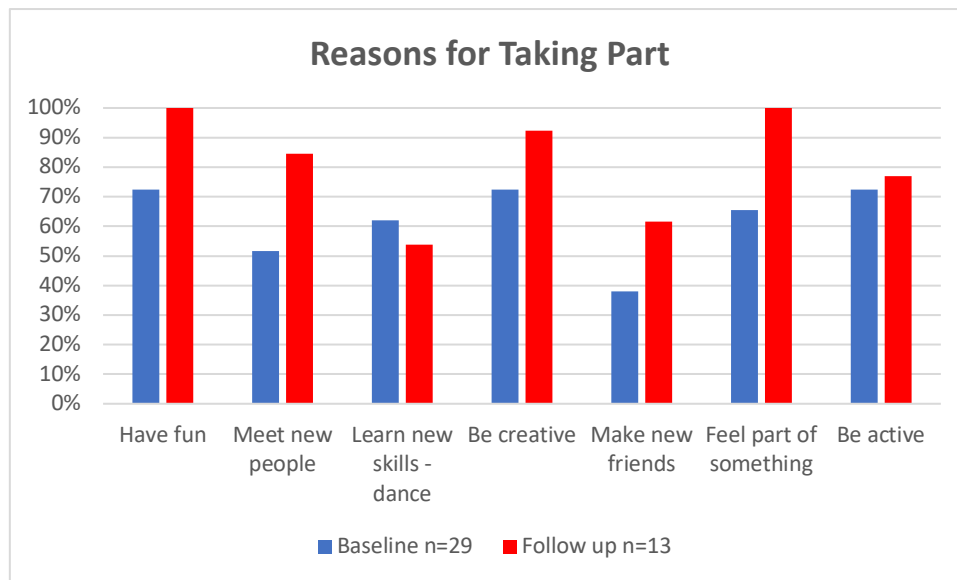


Figure 2 - Participants' expectations and reasons for taking part

This illustrates that in all areas, except for learning new dance skills, the participants' expectations were exceeded. Significantly, the two choices all participants identified has having been met was having fun and feeling part of something.

Participant wellbeing

The participants were asked questions about their wellbeing at the start and the end of the project. Wellbeing can be defined in a number of ways. NHS England recommends 5 steps to increasing wellbeing (NHS England, 2019):

1. *Connect with other people*
2. *Be physically active*
3. *Learn new skills*
4. *Give to others*
5. *Pay attention to the present moment*

This project considers it was able to meet all five of these requirements. The wellbeing measurement framework used is the WHO-5³ wellbeing scale, as this was felt to be the most appropriate and accessible for the sample group. The responses are illustrated below.

³ <https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/the-world-health-organisation-five-well-being-index-who-5/>

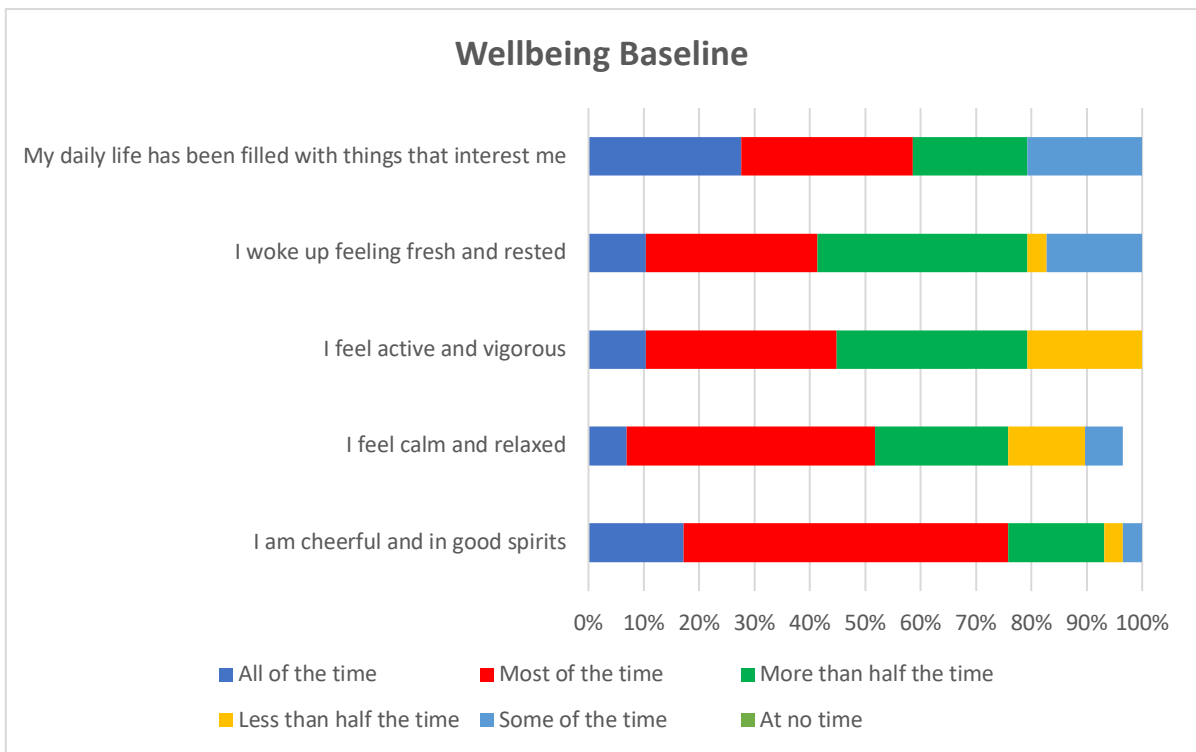


Figure 3 - Participant Wellbeing baseline

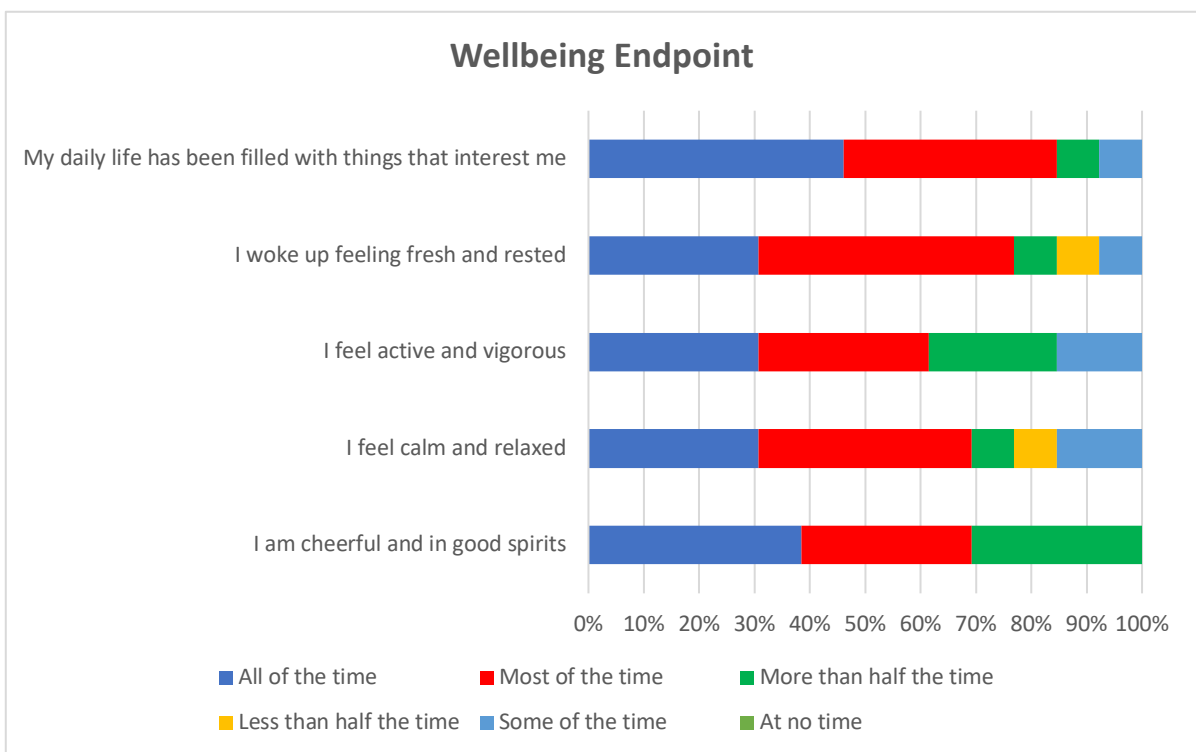


Figure 4 - Participant Wellbeing Endpoint

These graphs would indicate that there has been an increase in wellbeing across all measures, with most increase seen in responses to “My daily life has been filled with things that interest me” – increase of 18% selecting “All of the time”, and “I feel calm and relaxed” – increase of 24%. While these illustrations are an indicator of increase in wellbeing, due to the difference in sample sizes, it is not possible to use these alone as a guide to understand if the activities did increase feelings of wellbeing. Therefore, focus group sessions were conducted at midpoint and endpoint to better understand if participants did feel increased wellbeing.

- *There’s no right or wrong. When we dance we become more uplifted and open.*

One participant described the process of using the storytelling to create the dance, and how they felt it made the dance more meaningful, inclusive, and gave a feeling of agency over the development.

- *It felt more inclusive and empowered. The outcome of the dance is more persuasive because the dance contains people's individual stories which has more devotion in it. It is a very inclusive interactive collaborative process where dancers feel a sense of ownership.*

A continued theme from the responses and focus groups was the project made them feel valued which contributed to their wellbeing.

- *I've felt throughout the process that we were dancers first and elderly second. There was so much room for what we can do rather than what we can't do.*
- *You feel so useful suddenly*
- *I remember I felt useful in all the performances...but there was one particular lady, and she was sitting in a wheelchair and she reached out a hands and I reached out mine and this feeling of her starting to move in her way. So I did feel very useful you know just empowering her.*



Photograph 5 - Dance Re:Ignite performance at Trestle Arts Base

Creativity and confidence

BEEE Creative understands the benefits engagement in dance activity can have on participants. A number of studies have been undertaken that link engaging in creative activities and its positive impact on wellbeing. A recent report commissioned by the World Health Organisation in 2019 undertook a scoping review of the evidence of the role of arts in improving health and wellbeing and made several policy recommendations. Of Arts improving wellbeing it says: *Arts activities can be considered as complex or multimodal interventions in that they combine multiple different components that are all known to be health promoting.* (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). It further presents a logic model linking arts engagement outcomes to improved health and wellbeing (p.3). Additionally, research published from UCL, commissioned by BBC Arts (Fancourt, Garnett, Spiro, West, & Müllensiefen, 2019) has developed a validation scale measuring how creative activities regulate emotions, recognising the impact that engagement in arts activities has on health and wellbeing. The new Arts Council England 10-year strategy also makes clear links with engagement in creative activities and increased wellbeing. *Getting involved in creative activities in communities reduces loneliness, supports physical and mental health and wellbeing, sustains older people and helps to build and strengthen social ties.* (Arts Council England, 2020)

The participants were asked questions about creativity and confidence at baseline and endpoint with the understanding that these factors can contribute to feelings of wellbeing. At the more positive end of the scale, there was significant increase in responses to all questions with “Completely agree”, with 51% for “I feel confident contributing to the creative process” and a 47% increase for “I feel confidence creating with other people”.

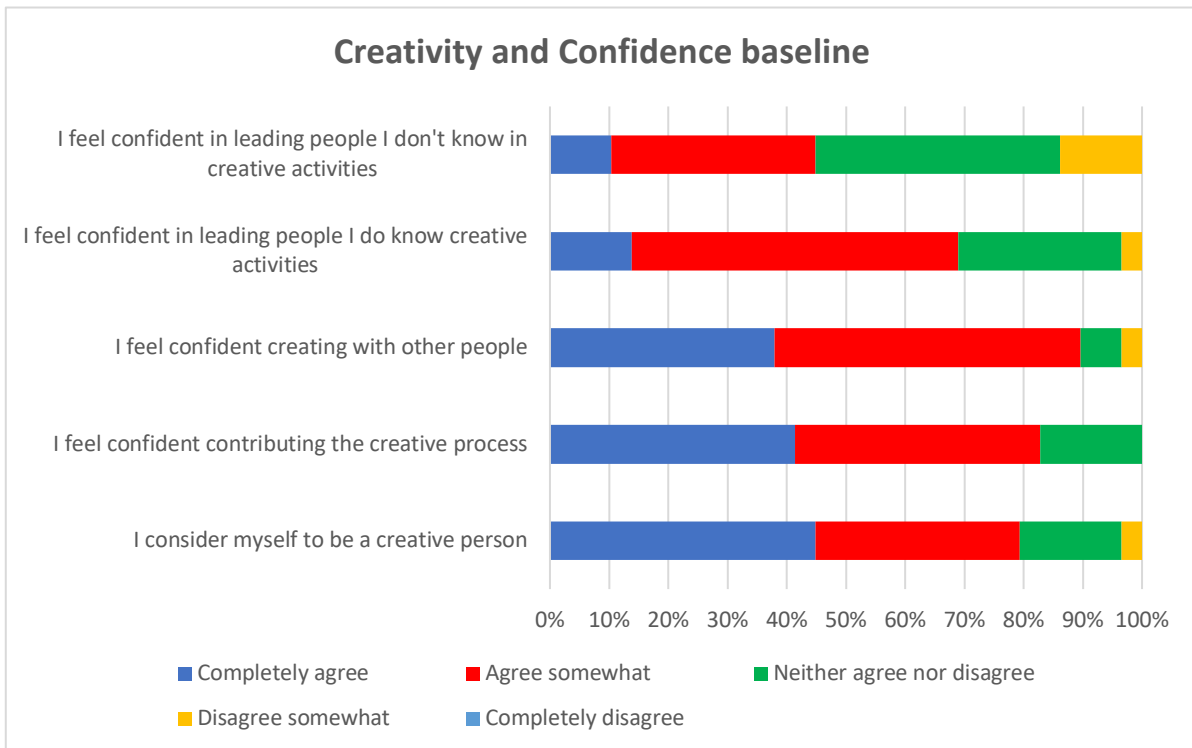


Figure 5 - Participant Creativity and Confidence baseline

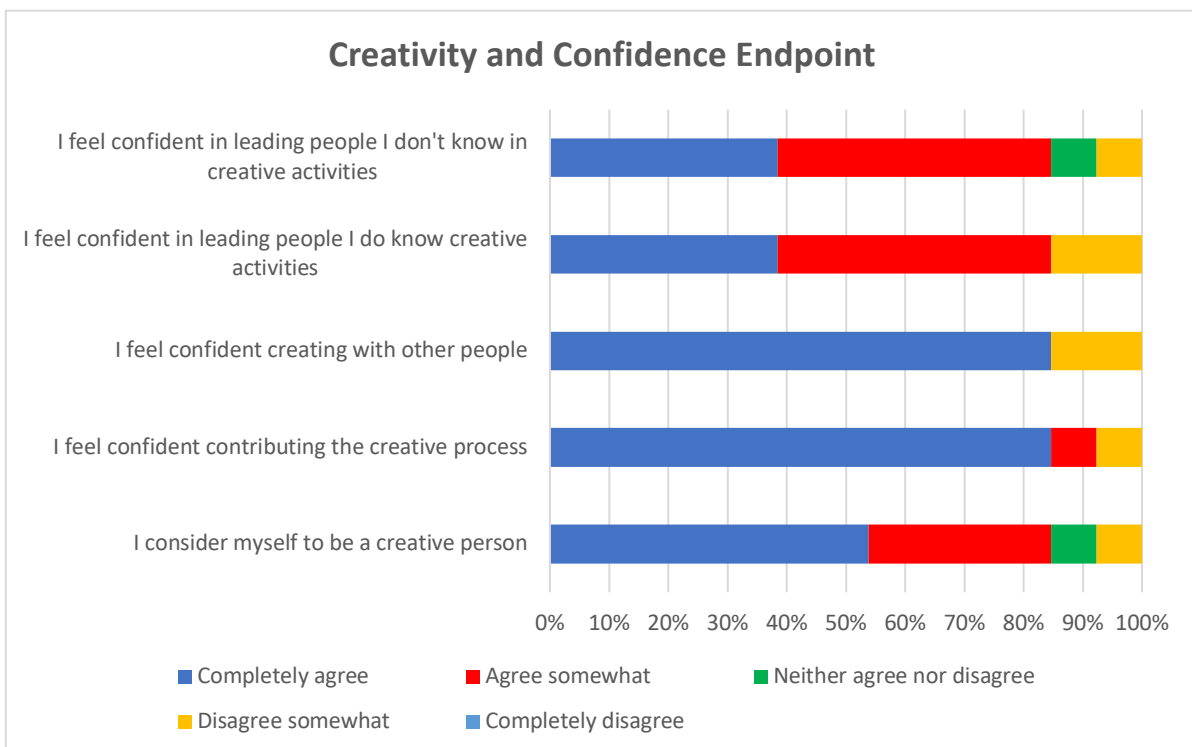


Figure 6 - Participant Creativity and Confidence Endpoint

Also significant was the increase in confidence in leading people in activities. This saw a 40% increase in those who agreed or completely agreed with “I feel confident in leading people I don’t know in creative activities”. Similarly, a 15% increase in responses of those who agreed or completely agreed was seen with “I feel confident leading people I do not in creative activities.” As with the previous wellbeing scores, focus group and qualitative responses were required to understand if this was representative of the participants.

- *[The project] gives confidence and the ability to do more and to see people enjoying what you do*
- *Really beautiful to be part of the creative process. To see the dance, with so much meaning, touch people was really humbling. Being part of a group of dancers with different ages and abilities and different life experiences was fantastic. Really interesting seeing ideas develop into movement and how that is then reflected in the music.*

One participant summed this experience by explaining that they could see the confidence of the group increasing via the creative process and wants the opportunity to further develop their skills.

- *My own confidence in co-creating and leading workshops definitely developed as I had not done this before. I saw others in our group also say that they felt their confidence was increasing too in these areas. We all learned about how to co-create, share ideas and interpret ideas into dance. We all took turns to lead the workshops. I found that I really enjoyed doing this too and would really love to develop workshop facilitation skills to be able to do more of this.*

Not all participants enjoyed the creative process. Some found the storytelling element challenging, and some found the initial stages of the process exposing.

- *The impro [sic] and subsequent rehearsals were very stressful. Not enough consideration was given to those taking part ie., too many observers and too much filming.*

It was fed back that the improvisation element was challenging and that they felt exposed as the rehearsals may have had additional people in them related to the project but unknown to participants.

- *Because I just don't think that at the improvisation and then subsequently the rehearsal stage, the feelings of the people involved who are actually doing the dancing were sufficiently respected. I found going in for those sessions difficult because quite often they'd be a stranger in the room.*

Another participant also commented on the creative process, and that while they enjoyed the process and project overall, they found the initial stages of the rehearsal challenging, due to their memory and the activities they were asked to do with people unknown to them.

- *I found the first two sessions awkward and intimidating. Would have been OK if asked to introduce myself to the group, say a little about my background and why I loved to dance but as someone with a poor memory having to pair off with someone and try to remember their story long enough to tell the rest of the group was not something I could do and made me feel very uncomfortable as did some of the other 'pairs' procedures.*

Thematic analysis of the endpoint and focus group responses to the question asking what they enjoyed most about the project, identified the most common response was performing and touring, demonstrating feelings of worth, being able to share the piece they had created.

- *It was lovely experience going out and doing the performance performing*
- *I liked it that our dance piece included a story or experience from each person in our group. There was a little bit of everyone in the creation of our dance*

The analysis also identified that the participants enjoyed the social connection opportunities taking part provided. While some did not make new friends as they were in already established groups, they enjoyed getting to know their group members better, and connecting with the audiences on the tour.

- *I've learned a lot about my fellow dancers about their personal dancers and how creative they are.*
- *It's learning about the other people in our group and listening to their stories. That has been very interesting learning about other people.*
- *It was the fact that there was real communication going on between the dancers and their audience and appreciation, flowing both ways. It was a truly creative experience.*
- *Connection becomes really encouraged through experience.*

One participant felt the entire process, one that was collaborative, enabled them to get to know their friends better, through the shared experience.

- *It was a wonderful collaborative process. I learned a great deal that I didn't know about my fellow participants – even those that I have known for several years. We laughed a great deal. Everyone was very supportive of each other - even when mistakes in the choreography were made.*

Some participants also particularly enjoyed the feeling they were 'giving back' to their audiences.

- *It gets quite emotional to see them joining in and enjoying it. You feel like you've given pleasure to someone else.*
- *Performing the dance in the community and delivering the workshops was always very moving and joyous. Bringing dance to people at all ages and stages of their lives was a wonderful experience.*
- *All the groups we performed for were grateful, which was humbling and despite some being quite reluctant to join in with the workshop very few refused once they saw others having fun.*

Test and explore barriers to engagement

The local approach

Through this project BEEE Creative was able to increase the reach of participants and audience by taking a hyper-local approach, as well as offering a digital strand of the work. The project reached over 1100 people – participants and audience – through the combination of the tour to community settings, doorstep performances and streamed activity. For many, these were new audiences to BEEE Creative's work. This was achieved through galvanising the local Dance Artists and participants to connect the work with settings and audiences in their local areas, as covered in [Cross-sector partnership development](#). The Project Administrator reflected the role that was willingly undertaken by the Dance Artists who were able to use their local knowledge and networks to reach community groups.

- *And I would also champion the energy and enthusiasm of the artists, who helped me with a fair few pre-existing connections to groups and contacts in which to build the tour in their areas, as well as offering to support the communication between all involved.*



Photograph 6 - Dance Re:ignite performance at Trestle Arts Base

Use of language

This process enabled the BEEE Creative team to better understand how they might support the ‘not yet’ engaged. This was partly via utilising the local connections held by the participants, artists and community partners. However, the connections themselves were not enough. Often this kind of work, that is hard to define, comes up against barriers due to a misunderstanding or lack of understanding of what it is. It was discovered that the language used to describe elements of the project was a potential barrier. The Project Administrator said that when this was addressed some barriers were removed.

- *Some of the initial language such as ‘performance’ and ‘workshop’ was daunting to them, but when changed to something more accessible like ‘sharing’ and ‘dancing with us’, they were more open to trial the experience. Subsequently, these ended up being the groups with particularly positive feedback, giving them an insight into what more they could offer their service users, and interested in working with us / the local artist again in the future.*

Further work needs to continue to understand how BEEE Creative may be able to support the ‘not yet’ engaged, particularly in how it may be able to provide more reassurance to some settings who are concerned about how dance may not be compatible with the needs of their users.

- *The service users often have very limited and painful conditions that may not offer themselves to this type of activity*

Removing barriers and retaining engagement

Further to exploring barriers to engagement and providing a point of access for first time audience and participants, the project also wanted to understand if it was addressing barriers that might preclude people to re-engage, both participants or audience. The participants were asked at the endpoint if they would like to take part in more projects like this (Fig.7). All but 2 of the respondents selected “Completely Agree” to this question.

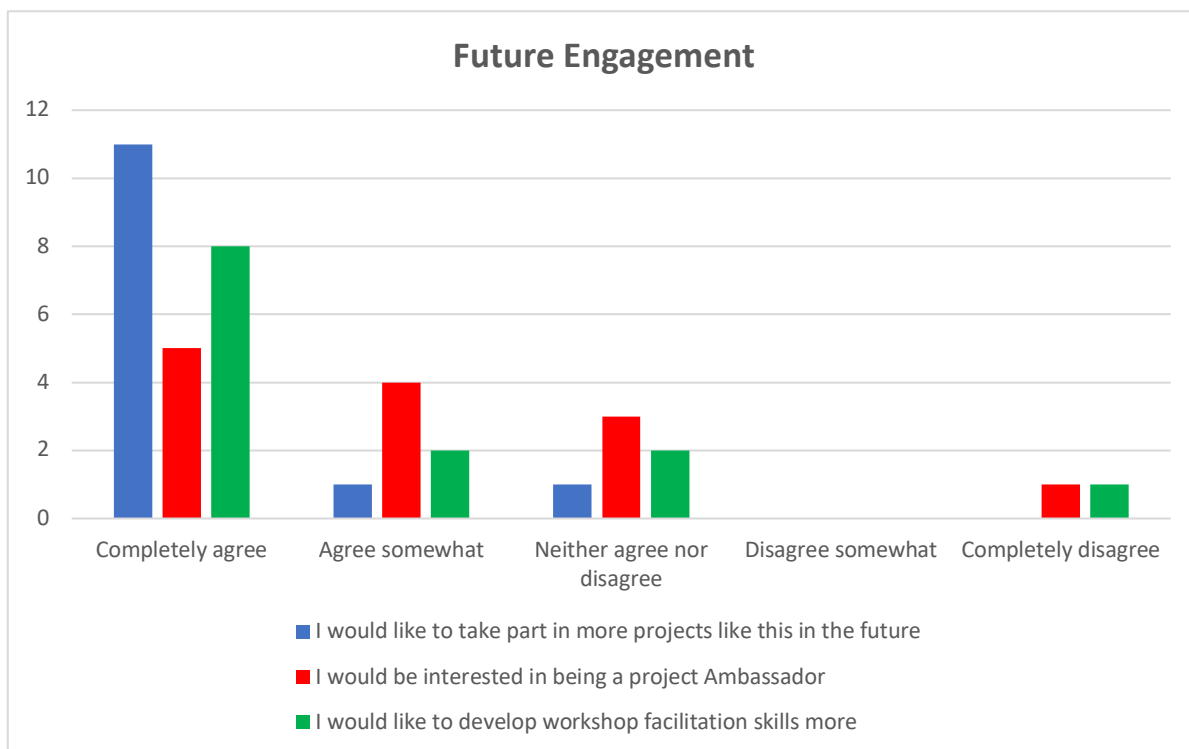


Figure 7 - Participant Future Engagement

As explored in [Participant wellbeing](#) they found the experience to be a positive one, that enabled them to feel connected and creative. They had ownership over the process and felt physical benefits. Again,

describing the project and the nature of their involvement, and the commitment required, continues to be an initial barrier.

- *I just did not know what this entailed. Next time I think I would be much more aware of the commitment and want to be committed*

However, once the participants understand what the nature of the work is, and what they are being asked to commit to, this becomes less of a barrier. Many of the participants said they wanted to take part in future projects.

- *I would like to be involved in future BEEE Creative projects.*
- *Get us involved in more such projects. This one finished too soon!*

BEEE Creative has done much to explore how to work with the 'not yet' engaged, and through its developing partnerships, is able to continue to explore how to keep those re-engaged. This is also the case with their participants, with further exploration in how to define what the offer is in terms that can be easily accessed by those 'not yet' engaged.



Photograph 7 - Dance Re:Ignite On Tour performance in Care Home setting

Conclusion

BEEE Creative has achieved the outcomes it set out at the start of the project. It aimed to develop community dance infrastructure in Hertfordshire. It did this through developing a hyper local approach to working with local dance artists and utilising their local connections. The project also worked on supporting those local dance artists to connect with other dance artists, and to broaden their own practice by working with artists who are specialists in other artforms. This did raise further exploration questions around the nature of co-creating work with communities, and a model with local artists, specialist artists and community groups that would work best.

Through this work, the project was able to explore and address some barriers to engagement, particularly those who were 'not yet' engaged. This was a multi-pronged strategy that combined working locally with community groups, creating an online method of engagement, as well as going to the residences of individuals who could not get out. There is further work to do in considering how to maintain the partnerships developed and retain the audiences and participants.

At the heart of BEEE Creative's work is the participant experience. This project adhered to those values and the participants on the whole did experience increased feelings of wellbeing, particularly by taking part in creative collaboration. This project has continued BEEE Creative's reputation of being a producer of highly regarded community dance activity, that has supported those involved to develop and thrive.

Recommendations

Co-creation model with artists

The co-creation model explored provided clear outcomes around the development of the dance artists' practice and confidence. Further questions were raised about how to best support the artists and participants in co-creation, and indeed, how to find a shared definition of what co-creation means in the context of this project. It is recommended that the questions raised from this project are developed and explored in future iterations of the work so that a model can be refined, and best practice shared.

Participants as ambassadors

Participants were enabled to take on a more ambassadorial role within in the project. This worked particularly in participants connecting the On Tour groups with community settings. There is further exploration to be done to understand if and how participants can be given responsibility to be ambassadors for the work to support encouraging more people to take part in dance activity.

Explaining the project to the not yet engaged

It has been identified in this and previous iterations of the project that a challenge is explaining the premise of the project. This appears to be a key barrier to taking part, as those who take the 'risk' mostly stay and have an enriching experience. It is recommended that further work is done, with participants, on working on how to describe and define the project, and to test further ways to encourage the not yet engaged to cross the threshold.

Development of partnerships – depth vs breadth

This project saw a large increase in connection with community settings. While it would be ideal to develop deeper partnerships with all of them, this is not feasible due to capacity and resource. It is recommended however, to review the connections made and develop criteria for ideal community partners, and then identify which of them would be of benefit to develop deeper working relationships with, so that these partnerships are in place for future work.

Participant feedback

This report gained rich feedback from the dance artists, which gave a clear insight into the process of the project. Unusually for this project the participant feedback was less detailed, particularly at the endpoint. It is recommended that all team members working directly with participants remind them the importance of taking part in evaluation, while being mindful that evaluation participation is voluntary. It is recommended that a review of how and when the follow up activities are done are reviewed so that participants and artists are best able to complete the evaluation.



Photograph 8 - Dance Re:Ignite On Tour performance in Watford

Kirsten Hutton
October 2022

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Appendix A – Activities Matrix

Baseline

Tool	Activity Strand	Detail
Participants		
Baseline Questionnaires	Commissions	To assess the starting points of skills base and feelings of wellbeing
Practitioners		
Baseline questionnaires	Commissions	To assess the starting points of skills base of practitioners To assess the expectations and desires for a practitioner network and practitioner training

Formative/Mid-point

Tool	Activity Strand	Detail
Participants		
Practitioner observations Evaluator observation	Commissions ON TOUR	Practitioner end of day feedback to highlight any observations of participants learning and applying new skills, enjoyment, making connections, collaborating etc
Monitoring		Monitoring of participation numbers Monitoring of participation demographics Year on year comparison of participation and demographics data
Practitioners		
Mid-point focus group	Commissions	To assess impact of longer development period To reflect on development before the commencement of ON TOUR
Practitioner self-reflection diaries	Commissions	To reflect on ongoing development To document learning, what is working, suggestions for improvement etc

Follow up

Tool	Activity Strand	Detail
Participants		
Follow up Questionnaires, sample interviews	Commissions ON TOUR	To assess skills learned, wellbeing impact against baseline To assess the success of being enabled to take on advocacy and buddying roles To assess the success of increasing the reach of working with established participants

Practitioners		
Follow up Questionnaires, interviews	Commissions ON TOUR	To assess if expectations of training To measure skills learned and applied To assess if practitioners feel more supported, valued and able to support others
Follow up interview with BEEE Creative team	All	To assess impact on artistic development, audience development and meeting BEEE Creative's strategic priorities
Audiences		
Post-performance feedback questionnaires	ON TOUR – Community Venues	To assess enjoyment and entertainment To assess appetite for taking part in future projects
Analytics	ON TOUR – online	To assess enjoyment and entertainment To assess feeling connected/appreciated

Appendix B – Film and Documentation

Dance Re:Ignite Documentary

<https://vimeo.com/729535635>



The film follows 5 local dance artists and 43 volunteers through the creation of their performance piece. Film produced by Simone Sistarelli and filmed by Spearhead Productions.

Open Letter

<http://beee-creative-cio.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Letter-to-Next-Generation.pdf>



A fictional letter written from one generation to another. It has been produced by Storyteller Miranda Quinney as a reflection of witnessing the storytelling, dance and sharing processes we went through during the Dance Re:Ignite project.

A reading of the letter is available on SoundCloud:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-949663282/dance-reignite-open-letter-to-future-generations>



Our Story (Audio Described)

<https://vimeo.com/745742574>

Created with Rebecca Benford, Full of Life Dance



Our Gift is Our Story (Audio Described)

<https://vimeo.com/745738776>

Created with Laura Horn, New Connections at Watford Museum



Our Brave Journey

<https://vimeo.com/745733841>

Created with Louise White, Dacorum Community Dance