

Dance Re:ignite 4.0

An Evaluation
For BEEE Creative CIO

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Executive Summary

Overview

Dance Re:Ignite 4.0 was a programme of dance activity, spanning from September 2023 to July 2025, that aimed to challenge the dance offer for 55+ year olds and disabled adults in Hertfordshire. It took place between. Building on previous iterations of Dance Re:Ignite, it hoped to increase the artistic ambition and demonstrate the impact of the work more widely across different sectors including Social Care and Sport. It took a hyper-localised approach to delivery across 6 towns in Hertfordshire, collaborating with local partners, local artists, volunteers, and leading national artists.

This is the fourth iteration of Dance Re:Ignite, founded on the need to provide a space for older people to have access to dance provision local to them. Furthermore, BEEE Creative identified that in order to enable this, better dance infrastructure needs to be in place. This does not just include the development of local dance artists but developing sustained cross-sector partnerships with organisations who work directly with and for older people.

The project was funded by Arts Council England, Dacorum Borough Council, North Herts Council, Watford Borough Council, East Herts Council, St Albans City and District Council and The Victoria Wood Foundation.

Project Aim

Dance Re:Ignite 4.0 aimed to increase the reach and access to high quality dance experiences for older adults and disabled adults in local communities in Hertfordshire. It aimed to increase the diversity of leaders of dance and develop the skills of dance local practitioners to attract less engaged communities in physical and creative activity.

Headline Findings

- Assumptions about older adults and disabled adults were challenged. Participants in the programme were challenged on assumptions about themselves and those they worked with. There was an increased sense of identity, with the dance workshops often drawing out hitherto unknown histories of those taking part.
- Wellbeing was impacted across the project. The Volunteer Dancers felt more connected to themselves, each other and their communities. The co-creation process enabled them to feel creative, have ownership of the project and valued for their contribution. Many felt good at being able to give back to the community. Benefits to wellbeing were also observed in those who took part as audience participants.
- Through the development of cross-sector partnerships, a greater reach and diversity of people accessed dance. In particular, older people in care homes and supported accommodation, often underserved were reached.
- Cross-sector partnerships were developed and strengthened, with 63% of partners new to BEEE Creative and numerous new to dance provision, and now increasingly likely to re-engage with this type of work again.
- BEEE Creative's co-creation practice is central to the impact that it creates. It aims to provide as much as possible a space for co-creation in its delivery with participants, and furthermore works towards a co-production model, involving as many stakeholder voices as possible in shaping its projects.
- BEEE Creative has further developed its co-creation practice, better understanding the role co-creation plays across its work, its benefits, and its limitations. BEEE Creative has demonstrated how it builds the conditions to enable its co-creation ethos, and this project has demonstrated that through modelling its practice this ethos continues via its participants.

Recommendations

Scale and replicate the model. Consider how this ‘hub and spoke’ model could reach beyond Hertfordshire. Capitalise on the infrastructure and network that has now been developed through this to provide the foundational support to expand into neighbouring counties.

Increase artist networking and peer support. For example:

- Practice sharing, especially around co-creation and its process.
- Training and support for artists where the work will take them into dementia specialist care homes, or working with adults with learning disabilities

Build on the partnerships leveraging those who ‘know’ BEEE’s work to support and advocate the work to new potential partners.

Explore the impact on not just how others see older people as a result of the project but the impact on participants’ own sense of identity and how they see themselves.

Increase delivery support for the Dance Artists when on tour. This role could provide additional pastoral, technical and administrative support.

Review the length of the tour to find a balance that ensures momentum is maintained but does not overwork or exhaust the Volunteer Dancers.

Increase production of short form film content that documents or explains the process of the project to enable those new to it – potential participants or partners – to be able to conceptualise it, increasing buy-in.

1 Introduction

Dance Re:Ignite 4.0 was a programme of dance activity, spanning from September 2023 to July 2025, that aimed to challenge the dance offer for 55+ year olds and disabled adults in Hertfordshire. Building on previous iterations of Dance Re:Ignite it hoped to increase the artistic ambition and demonstrate the impact of the work more widely across different sectors including Social Care and Sport. To do this it took a hyper-localised approach to delivery across 6 towns in Hertfordshire, collaborating with local partners, local artists, volunteers, and leading national artists.

This is the fourth iteration of Dance Re:Ignite and it was founded on the need to provide a space for older people to have access to dance provision local to them. Furthermore, BEEE Creative identified that in order to enable this, better dance infrastructure needs to be in place. This does not just include the development of local dance artists but developing sustained cross-sector partnerships with organisations who work directly with and for older people. BEEE Creative sees itself as a connector and developer of dance at hyper-local level, and in order for it to continue to offer this it needs longer-term funding to embed and sustain a dance legacy that support beneficiaries longer-term.

The project was funded by Arts Council England, Dacorum Borough Council, North Herts Council, Watford Borough Council, East Herts Council, St Albans City and District Council and The Victoria Wood Foundation.

2 Activity

Over the two years the project delivered:

- Commissions: 6 dance, music and interdisciplinary performance pieces co-created with artists and adults aged 55+ or learning-disabled Volunteer Dancers
- Tour: A programme of 54 performance/workshop packages in communities with groups such as Care Homes, Schools, and Social Clubs
- Residencies: 11 artist/volunteer-in-residence programmes with 11 groups that experience inequity/disadvantage accessing dance
- Dance Films: 6 dance films co-authored by older adults/disabled adults. 2 films were audio described and all films were subtitled
- Festivals: 2 Festivals and 2 symposia
- Artist mentoring
- 2 internships
- Volunteer training

3 Project Aim

The aim of the project was to increase the reach and access to high quality dance experiences for older adults and disabled adults in local communities in Hertfordshire. To do this, Dance Re:Ignite 4.0 aimed to increase the diversity of leaders of dance, develop the skills of dance local practitioners to attract less engaged communities in physical and creative activity.

3.1 Outcomes

To understand if the aim had been met the following outcomes were identified. Success indicators for each outcome were also defined.

1. Through co-creation and cross-sector partnerships, develop greater equity in the local dance sector by developing community dance infrastructure in targeted towns in Hertfordshire.

- a. Increased representation of social, cultural and embodied identities involved in dance for the future.
- b. Assumptions about older adults and disabled adults challenged
- c. Increased skills of local dance artists

2. Increased feelings of wellbeing in participants and volunteers.

- a. Increased community connection
- b. Increased feelings of being creative
- c. Increased feelings of belonging, being valued and being heard

3. Increase reach and remove barriers to engagement, particularly for older adults and adults with disabilities with limited access to activities.

- a. Increased connection of cross-sector partners advocating for wider dance for wellbeing provision

3.2 Evaluation Aims

This evaluation will assess if the identified outcomes have been achieved and will use the findings from previous Dance Re:Ignite evaluations to support the data. This evaluation will also seek to understand the following questions:

1. What are the conditions that are needed to enable hyper-local working to benefit the project's intended beneficiaries?
2. What is the impact on that way of working on those beneficiaries?

The areas of focus for these questions are:

- a. Development of the co-creation model
- b. What is the role of participants and partners in enabling hyper-local working
 - a. Participants as ambassadors
 - b. Partnership development

4 Project Information

4.1 Outputs and Reach

The following table documents the reach of the project. It reached 5210 participants and audience, created 5 dance performances, 6 films (all subtitled and 2 audio described) and produced 2 Festivals and 2 Symposia.

	Unique individuals	Sessions	Events
Artists	43	-	-
Volunteer Dancers	55	-	-
Participants	3286	-	-
Artist Network and Training	-	4	3
Co-creation workshops	-	76	76
Volunteer Day	-	8	4
Tour	-	54	54
Residency	-	55	55
Filming	-	8	9
Festival & Symposium	2204	17	14
TOTAL ATTENDANCE	5210		

4.2 Participants

Volunteer Dancers, aged 55+ were recruited to five of the areas, building on existing groups and participants who had taken part in previous Dance Re:Ignite projects. New participants were also recruited to the project. One group, St Albans, was a pre-existing group, made up of adults with learning disabilities and their carers.

Audiences who participated in workshops were drawn from a wide range of community settings including care homes, FE college, schools and lunch clubs. Audience participants who took part in the residency projects were usually from lunch clubs or care homes, and some for people with dementia.

4.3 Community Partners

A community partner is an organisation that supported the engagement of participants, especially those with limited access to dance provision. The community partners played a role in widening the network web in local areas by joining up and complementing the services provided by others. BEEE Creative worked with 44 Community Partners during the project, 63% of them new to BEEE Creative, a considerable number of relationships to managed and nurture, but demonstrating the hyper-local nature of the work. The following list illustrates the spectrum of partnerships.

Provider	Number of Partners
Care Homes	11
Day Services	7
Lunch Clubs	12
Education Settings	3
Arts Providers	4
Local Authorities	2
Other Service Providers	3

4.4 Place

The towns BEEE Creative worked in were Bishops Stortford (East Herts), Hemel Hempstead (Dacorum), Royston/Letchworth (North Herts), South Oxhey (Three Rivers), St Albans, and Watford. These places were selected to build on existing relationships with local artists, partners, participants and volunteers. It is worth noting that North Herts was a new area to this project but BEEE Creative was able to build on partnerships it had developed through other projects. It leveraged these relationships to continue to develop the knowledge, skills and experience existing in those areas, with a view to providing strong roots to reach out, increase engagement, and make change more widely in the community.

4.5 Artist Partners

The following Artist Partners were attached to the project.

- Moving Memory Dance – mentoring and guidance
- Vida Wellness Club – Commission development, tour and residencies
- Dacorum Community Dance – Commission development, tour and residencies
- Full of Life Dance – Commission development, tour and residencies
- Trestle Arts Base – Commission development, tour and residencies
- New Connections, Watford Museum – Commission development, tour and residencies

4.6 Support Team

The project was also able to offer paid roles to provide project support. The Dacorum group had the support from a Technical Assistant who not only provided technical support but also took on some logistical and pastoral support. Another team member joined the project as a trainee supporting the creative process, tour of performances and workshops, community residencies, as well supporting the Festivals. At the point of joining the team they were not in employment or education but have now gone to start a degree.

4.7 Participant Nomenclature

There were layers of participation in this project, with different ways to take part. A simple nomenclature for participants has been established for this report to enable ease of delineation between participant type. They will be referred to in the following ways in this report.

Volunteer Dancer: Participants who took part in the co-creation workshops to create a performance and workshop that then toured to community settings in their local area. Some Volunteer Dancers also supported the work in the Residencies.

Audience Participant: Participants who are from community settings who may have seen the performance and/or participated in one or more workshops.

5 Methodology and Limitations

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 – Activities Matrix](#).

The Volunteer Dancers completed a baseline and endpoint survey, except for those in the St Albans group. Their feedback was provided via their lead artist. Due to the scale of the project, the feedback from participants has provided an overarching narrative of the project and its impact, it is not possible to provide an in-depth analysis of each individual group. Interviews with participants from different performance groups were undertaken for a deeper understanding of the project.

6 Co-Creation

The evaluation of Dance Re:Ignite 3.0 found that striving for co-creation yields strong outcomes for participants, but that it is complex to navigate. *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.* (Hutton, 2022)

Dance Re:Ignite 4.0 sought to further develop its model of co-creation, and to understand what this means to participants and project partners. Firstly, in order to do this, a definition of co-creation ought to be considered. Co-creation initially came about as a term that was used in business environments to refer to the participation of customers in the creation of products and services. (Matamala & Soler-Vilageliu, 2021) A review of literature provided a range of definitions of co-creation in participatory arts programmes. For example, one study described *Co-creation in participatory arts practice is a collaborative and dynamic process that involves the active engagement of artists and community members working together to generate creative outcomes.* (Watson, 2023) It is a good starting point, and it goes on to describe the complex nature of co-creation, in that it *involves complex dynamics of*

equality, inclusivity, and community engagement. This and other studies go on to describe the principles or themes that underpin co-creation in arts practice.

Throughout this project BEEE Creative has formatively reflected on the concept of co-creation, how it might be defined within their work and what this looks like. They have also reflected on the challenges that being truly co-creative brings. While a review of literature on co-creation might be beneficial, it is more in keeping with the principles of co-creation to focus on views and inputs from those who were involved in this project. In December 2024, when the majority of the commissioned dances had been created, BEEE Creative held a Dance Re:Ignite Symposium that invited Artists, Partners and Volunteer Dancers to come together, to discuss the nature of co-creation. It heard from Moving Memory Dance¹, a dance company that works with older people creating performances for public spaces, festivals and theatres and Confidance², a dance organisation working in schools, community settings, and arts venues, who make dance and performance with dancers with learning disabilities. These organisations shared their expertise and practice in co-creation. The symposium explored possible definitions of co-creation, underpinning principles, and the benefits of co-creation. It also asked the question: *Is it truly co-creation?*

6.1 Defining Co-Creation for BEEE Creative

Together the stakeholders defined co-creation – in the context of Dance Re:Ignite – as being a process in which artists, participants, and partners are actively involved in the design, development and delivery of artistic experiences and outputs. Co-creation values process over product and its nature of sharing the creation of artistic outputs means that it is not possible to know what the final output will be at the outset of the work. It requires as much a non-hierarchical approach as possible that involves shared decision making, mutual respect, and the bringing together a diversity of perspectives. It should strive for an outcome of each stakeholder feeling they have contributed to and achieved something valuable from the process.

While this definition provides an overarching ‘what’ it is, further exploration of ‘how’ it is achieved is required. The symposium identified a number of themes or principles; these were also identified in surveys and interviews with volunteer dancers.

- **Inclusivity and applicability:** Making space to enable all voices to be shared and valued, and that this practice can be applied with a range of stakeholders in a variety of settings
- **Curiosity, flexibility and openness:** Listening and responding to the voices in the space and being open to a range of perspectives
- **Process and product:** While the final output is important, the journey of creating together is often more important than the final artistic output.
- **Trust, exchange and mutual learning:** A shared understanding that each person brings skills and experience valuable to the co-creation process
- **Enjoyment and fun:** The process must be enjoyable. While it may be challenging, and require some vulnerability that comes with openness, that feels riskier for some, it must offer a sense of enjoyment and fun.
- **Creative Stimulus:** Using creative stimulus as a jumping off point is required in co-creation. This could be derived from anywhere, stories, music, artwork etc.
- **Time, Reflection and Iteration:** It takes time to build trust, relationships, and time to ensure all voices are heard in the creation process. Space is needed to try, fail, and succeed is

¹ <https://www.movingmemorydance.com/about-us/>

² <https://www.confidance.org.uk/copy-of-our-mission>

required and reflection on those successes and challenges is needed, in order to develop the process.

These themes will be explored in more detail in [Analysis of Practice: Conditions for Co-Creation](#).

6.2 Benefits of Co-Creation

Understanding the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ in the context of this project is important as it serves to explain the ‘why’, or the benefits of Co-Creation. Research identifies numerous benefits of co-creation on participants, communities and organisations. The concept of co-creation - the process of involving multiple stakeholders in the design and development of products, services, or experiences – began in business with consumers being involved in the design and development of products and services, which then developed into consumers being part of the marketing process. *Co-creation finds its origin in co-production where consumer participation was integrated in the supply chain.* (De Koning, Crul, & Wever, 2016). From a broader cross-sector perspective, the benefits of co-creation include increased customer satisfaction, improved innovation, increased return on investment, increased inclusion, increased social connections and increased skill development.

Through a participatory arts lens, BEEE Creative has built its own evidence base that outline the benefits of co-creation on its stakeholders. These benefits were also identified in the symposium event and through interviews with artists and Volunteer Dancers on this project.

- Increased self-esteem
- Increased social connection for the individual and with communities
- Increased feelings of agency and identity
- Increased confidence of creative self-expression
- Skills development and increased appetite for ongoing learning
- Increased intergenerational understanding

Each of these benefits can sit within the umbrella ‘wellbeing’ term. What this means, within the context of this and participatory arts-based projects is explored in [Dance and Wellbeing](#). The analysis of the project outcomes will further explore some of these benefits.

6.3 Challenges of Co-Creation

While the benefits of co-creation are increasingly understood, the challenges of this approach need to be considered. The symposium highlighted some of these challenges particular to this project.

Systems Barriers

Funding and planning: Grant applications often require detailed plans, limiting flexibility and undermining the idea of community-driven decision-making.

Institutional systems: Existing funding and institutional systems don’t always support authentic co-creative methodologies.

Meeting participants (and artists) where they are

Balancing different needs: Participants arrive with varying motivations, experiences, backgrounds and access needs. Some seek and feel safe with structured instruction, while others prefer improvisation. Some participants feel more comfortable with the ‘process’ approach, whereas for others it is daunting. Artists have a role to balance these dynamics to create a space where everyone feels valued, while maintaining artistic goals.

Finding the balance

Challenges in the Creative Process: Artists must make decisions to ensure a final product emerges, which can sometimes feel at odds with the principle of authentic co-creation. Holding that space and ensuring all voices contribute can be challenging to navigate and find a balance.

Co-creation is an ongoing, complex process requiring constant negotiation, reflection, and adaptation. Authentic co-creation involves shared power and contribution but achieving this requires systemic change and a balance between structure and flexibility.

6.4 Co-creation or Co-production?

These challenges pose the question for BEEE Creative to consider how co-creative they are able to be from the design to the delivery of their projects. During the symposium BEEE Creative's Director discussed these challenges and shared reflections on co-creation in dance, questioning the authenticity of the term and exploring its complexities.

Firstly, while this report has attempted to provide a definition of co-creation, this may not be how others define it. It is a frequently used term, but is understood differently by others, and it may not accurately describe all projects, especially those that have predetermined funder requirements already in place.

Secondly, co-creation as being defined as having a non-hierarchical approach implies shared 'power and control'. However, at some point someone must take the lead in decision making. This could be at organisational level, or in the space with participants.

BEEE Creative is evolving its practice by centring co-creation values in its work through involving participants, partners and artists in decision making processes via community and artist steering groups and consultation. While the entire organisation may not be able to operate co-creatively all the time, the artistic spaces they create are collaborative and inclusive.

It may be that for BEEE Creative the term 'co-production' sits more comfortably, whereby multiple stakeholders – artists, partners, participants – are collaborators and jointly contribute to the creation, development, and delivery of projects. BEEE Creative retains overall oversight, but with stakeholders providing valuable input at each stage of a project, from inception, to delivery, to post project learning.

7 Dance and Wellbeing

Finding consensus on a definition of wellbeing can be challenging. The World Health Organisation describes it as: *“Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose.”* (World Health Organisation, 2025). It defines mental health as: *“a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”* (World Health Organisation, 2022). The OECD has identified that wellbeing is an important measure that goes beyond using GDP as a measure of economic output to understand if life is getting better for people and for whom. It recognises that improving people's wellbeing *requires balancing economic, social and environmental objectives and focusing on relationships and social connectedness.* (OECD, 2024)

NHS England describes wellbeing as not just the absence of ill health but includes the way that people feel about themselves and their lives. It is generally thought to be made up of things like the experience of positive emotions, people's perceptions that the things they do in their lives are meaningful and worthwhile, and life satisfaction. (NHS England, 2022) It has outlined five ways 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*

It is important to frame wellbeing in the context of this project and there is increasing research that evidences the impact of dance on wellbeing, for example, dance supports emotional expression, stress reduction, mental resilience and it fosters social connection. Arts Council England's 'Celebrating Age Evaluation', a study of 32 projects over 3 years focusing on arts for older people, found that older adults involved in dance activities led to reduced anxiety, and greater emotional engagement. Older adults involved in regular dance activities show improved emotional regulation, especially in managing loneliness and depression (Blood, Easterbrook, & Robinson, 2023). This report outlines wellbeing themes in its findings, that are echoed in this report. These themes include place and connection, identity and relationships, and (re)discovering creativity.

BEEE Creative uses creative interventions that aim to support participants in exploring and developing their own creativity and sees this as a contributor to wellbeing. In the 2013 'The effects of participating in creative activities on the health and well-being of children and young people: Rapid Literature Review', the researchers found, *"The most commonly reported outcome in all the studies reviewed was that of increased confidence. It is also noteworthy that increased self-esteem, sense of achievement, empowerment, social skills, and positive behavioural changes are consistently reported outcomes throughout the review. These factors along with the increased level of knowledge reported all contribute to an individual's sense of self-confidence and well-being, which suggests that participating in creative activities can have a positive effect on the well-being of children and young people."* (Dr Bungay & Dr Vella-Burrows, 2013)



Photograph 1 Culmination Dance at Dance Re:Ignite Festival 2024

8 What Happened

Dance Re:Ignite 4.0 worked with community dance groups to firstly co-create a performance piece that would be toured to local community settings in the local area. Each group was facilitated by a dance artist, experienced working with older people or adults with learning disabilities, and a visual artist. Together – artists and volunteers – created a dance piece that drew inspiration from the lived experience of the Volunteer Dancers, with each following a theme that celebrated the lives and contributions of those involved in the project.

These performances were then toured to community settings, reaching a varied audience. The Volunteer Dancers also delivered an accompanying workshop, based on the themes of their performance. These workshops were designed to offer an opportunity for movement for their audiences and to demonstrate “anyone can dance.”

In addition, each group delivered two 5-week residencies to community groups, including care homes, dementia care homes, and lunch clubs. Dance artists facilitated workshops with the groups, supported by some of the Volunteer Dancers. The workshops leaned heavily on the themes of the original dance pieces and were aimed at encouraging the participants in the settings to engage, move, and share something of themselves.

Alongside the tour and residencies two annual festivals were produced. The first Festival was a day of performances as well as dance and visual arts workshops at The Eric Morecambe Centre, Harpenden. The second Festival took place over 14 days and incorporated a performance of Moving Memory Dance’s Golden Slumbers on Watford High Street at part of the Watford Fringe, a performance platform at Trestle Arts Base, film screening and afternoon tea at The Old Town Hall Hemel Hempstead and online screenings.

8.1 Wellbeing

The focus on wellbeing for this evaluation is on the Volunteer Dancers. Due to the nature of how the audience participants engaged with the project it was more challenging to gather direct feedback from them. However, observed feedback from artists and partners has been recorded.

8.1.1 Volunteer Dancers

The Volunteer Dancers were asked to complete a baseline survey (n=24) at the start of the project and were asked to complete an endpoint (n=21) survey at the end of their on the project. Due to the needs of the St Albans group, they were not asked to complete the surveys. Their feedback was drawn through their dance artist feedback and observations.

The Volunteer Dancers were asked a series of questions that were framed around indicators of wellbeing. Firstly, they were asked about their expectations for the project, and at endpoint were asked again if they felt these expectations were met.

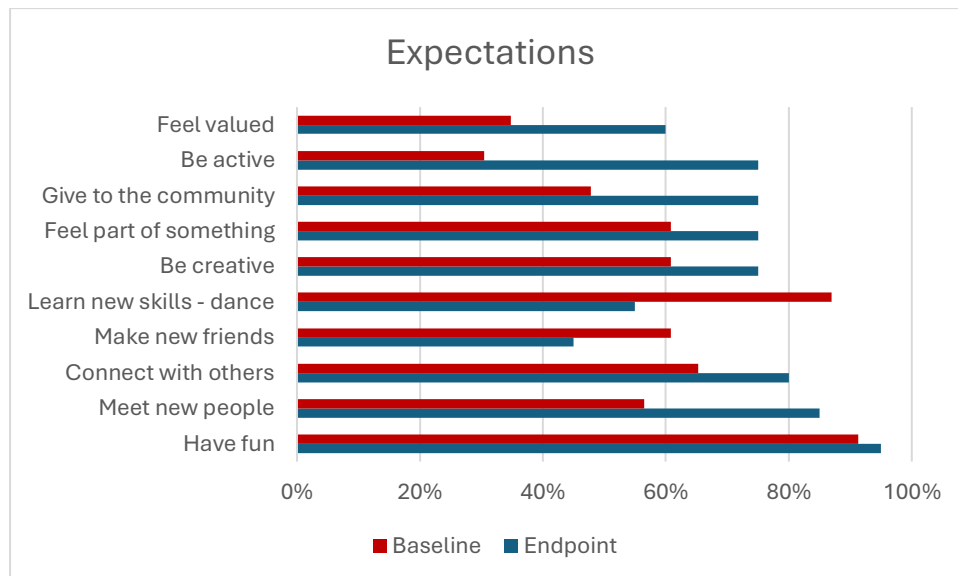


Figure 1 Project Expectations

On the whole the Volunteer Dancers' expectations were exceeded across the questions. In particular, being active far exceeded expectations, as did feeling valued and giving to the community. Where expectations were not met was learning new dance skills. This may be because the majority of the Volunteer Dancers were returning participants who regularly take part in dance activity.

Volunteer dancers were also asked five questions, based on the WHO-5 (World Health Organisation, n.d.) wellbeing questions, that aimed to assess if they felt that participating in the project had had any impact on factors of their wellbeing.

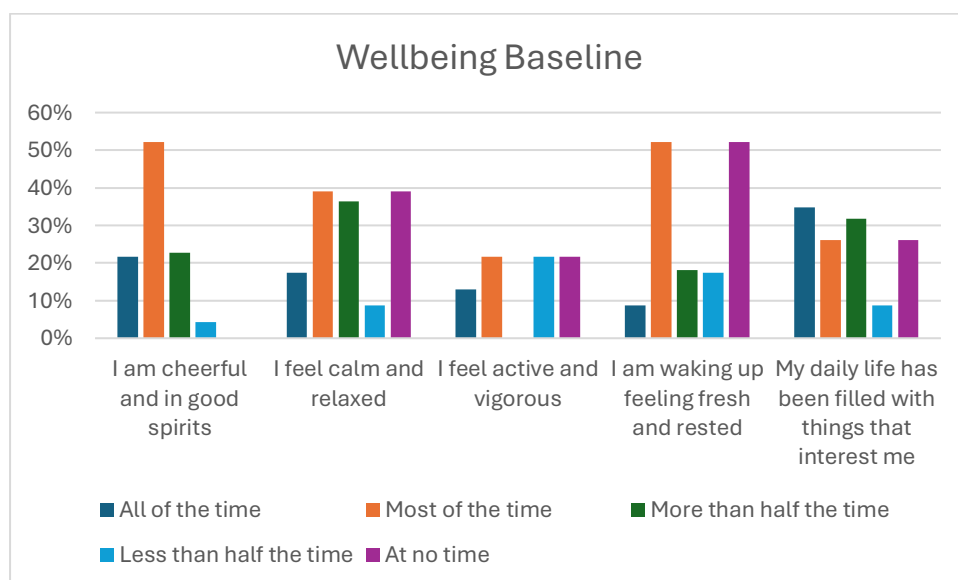


Figure 2 Wellbeing Baseline

The responses the wellbeing questions at baseline illustrate a group who largely have good indicators of wellbeing, with over half feeling cheerful and in good spirits. Fewer Volunteer Dancers felt active and vigorous, with just under half feeling like this less than half the time, or at no time. Likewise, a third of the respondents felt their daily life was filled with things that interested them less than half the time or not at all.

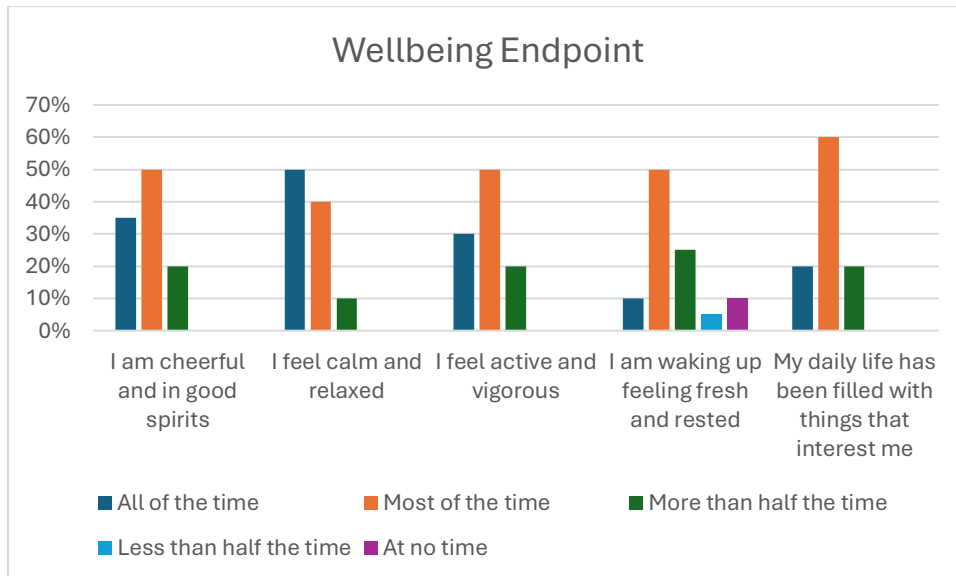


Figure 3 Wellbeing Endpoint

The Volunteer Dancers were asked at the end of their experience to rate how they felt. Improvement can be seen across all wellbeing indicators, even for those who already had a good baseline. The most significant improvement is feeling active and vigorous, with 80% feeling like this most or all of the time, compared to just 35% at baseline. More respondents felt their life was filled with things that interested them with 70% feeling like this most or all of the time, compared to 48% at baseline.

- *“Dancing gives me a sense of freedom, helps me to feel connected to other people and local community. Dancing also makes me feel energetic!”*
- *“I found it a healing experience after a [health] diagnosis. It felt good to be able to give back to the community.”*
- *“This dance project keeps me cheerful, active, creative and sociable. I have made several new friends, and renewed old friendship, through dance. Keeps me feeling youthful, too.”*

To further understand the impact on wellbeing, the Volunteer Dancers were asked questions pertaining to their creativity and its influence on how they felt.

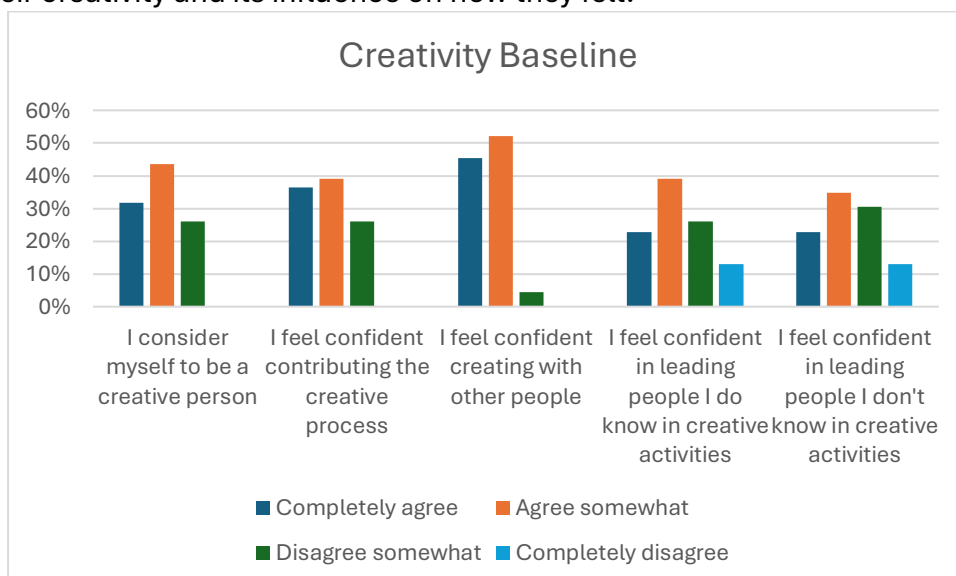


Figure 4 Creativity Baseline

The responses to the questions about how they felt about their own creativity and contributing to the creative process were generally positive. Although some felt unconfident in this area.

- *“I feel I am not confident re creativity in myself.”*

The statement garnering the most positive response was ‘I feel confident creating with other people.’ There was less confidence among the respondents about leading people in creative activities.

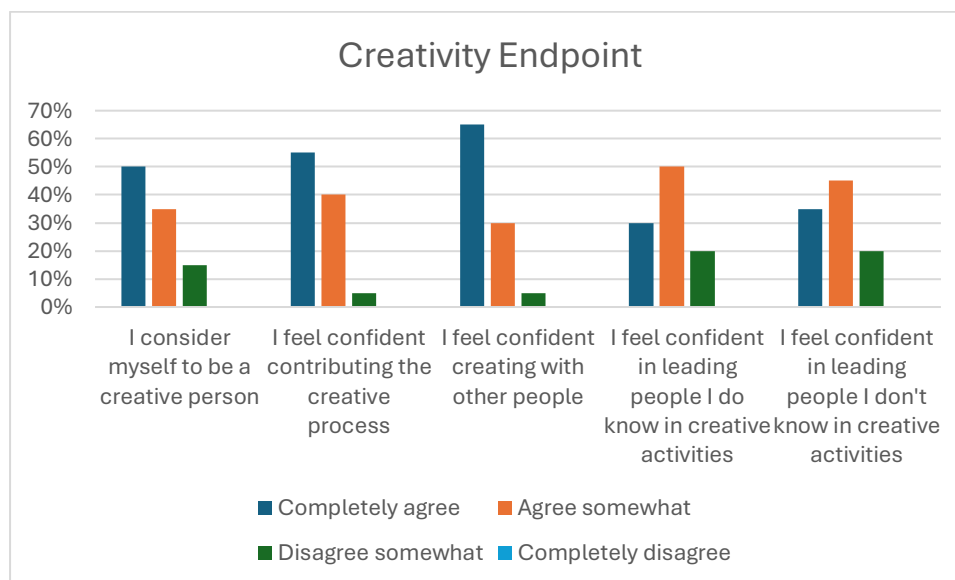


Figure 5 Creativity Endpoint

As with the wellbeing statements, there was a similar shift to increased positive responses to the creativity statements. Respondents agreed more with the statement ‘I consider myself to be a creative person’ and felt more confident contributing to the creative process. While already a strong starting point, confidence creating with other people also increased. While some respondents still did not feel confident in leading creative activities, that increased for most.

- *“Dancing helps me feel less conscious and less inhibited with body movements.”*
- *“I am much more confident in just presenting myself, thinking that acceptable, but able to fit with others where needed. I have enjoyed making my own movements.”*
- *“The project was a fantastic opportunity to develop my creativity and confidence. Something I had not been able to experience for a long time.”*

One Volunteer Dancer described the impact the project had had on them both in terms of creativity and connection.

- *“Maintaining and extending my authentic creative movements ,sharing and drawing from the energies of others.”*

Increased confidence, feeling valued and heard

The process of co-creation and the performances themselves supported the Volunteer Dancers to feel heard. Throughout the process their ideas had been listened to and incorporated into the dance. The artist working with the St Albans group reflected on the group’s ownership and excitement for the performance, as they can see the origins of the movements and moments they have created. One of the Volunteer Dancers in this group described the step up this project was for them.

- *“The process and how we did it was, I think, was really good. I think how from the rehearsal up to doing it with the lights, I think that was, like a big step up as well. How we all did it and how...Being able to do a lot of the skills that I haven't even done and be able to. Being able to adapt and learning and hopefully taking out new stuff and new material, be able to take it out*

into communities, be able to show that actually people with disabilities can act, dance and explore new areas.” (Volunteer Dancer)

This was echoed by other artists and their groups who also saw that through the incorporation of their ideas and stories, the Volunteer Dancers felt valued and heard.

- *“It was all their ideas. And that was the really important thing that they wanted it to be a personal thing, other than a dance that was taught. It was just to tell a real personal story. And the [Volunteer Dancers], you know, they've got stories, they've been through wonderful things, and you know, sad things as well, and challenging things.” (Support Artist)*
- *“It feels good when you are old and can still do something! We oldies can share our experiences with younger people.” (Volunteer Dancer)*

Further to feeling increased confidence and feeling valued, the Volunteer Dancers themselves expressed feelings of a new sense of self. For some this was just confidence in their own creativity and for others, it helped them see themselves in new ways.

- *“I don't see myself as particularly creative... but I could think up things and do them. That surprised me.” (Volunteer Dancer)*
- *“I have a new title now - I am a performer.” (Volunteer Dancer)*

Even when the Volunteer Dancers did not feel they were creative, they still came back each week, taking part and contributing ideas, demonstrating that they were able to be part of the creative process.

- *“One lady particularly is adamant that she isn't creative and says she doesn't really understand it but she keeps coming and gives everything and contributing ideas.” (Artist)*

Other Volunteer Dancers described how taking part in this project, and the dancing in particular, renewed their sense of self.

- *“I'm smiling just thinking about it. It makes me feel like me again.” (Artist)*

The artists were able to observe increased confidence and sense of self. One artist noted a conversation with a volunteer dancer who has been part of the previous iterations of Dance Re:Ignite.

- *“Another dancer, expressed her amazement at her own progress and growth since joining the group during the lockdown.” (Artist)*
- *“I have felt more confident as we progressed, and being of a certain age it was easy to relate on some occasions.” (Volunteer Dancer)*

For others, they reflected on the benefits of the physical movement and how it made them feel. They described it as a reason to keep going.

- *“I've got rheumatoid arthritis... but I make sure I take my meds and go dancing. It keeps me going.” (Volunteer Dancer)*
- *“It made me feel like I could still move. That I could still do something.” (Volunteer Dancer)*

The Volunteer Dancers also identified that their confidence in delivering the workshops increased, as did interacting with their audiences, and those in the residencies. One artist observed:

- *And my dancers as well...were sort of developing things as we went along, like developing moves themselves that all we could try... They're really good, including people and seeing what people, the participants were doing and catching on for those and developing their movements with them and dancing with each person and just going around the room. So they were just amazing, really. I think if I wasn't there, they could definitely run it themselves.” (Artist)*

Another artist described their dancers developing facilitation skills of assessing how people are engaged, and then using strategies to keep people engaged.

- *“They were absolutely amazing at reading the room, responding to the residents, going and doing it, whether it was holding their hands and doing a dance with them. They were not scared about going and interacting one -to -one.” (Artist)*

The artists themselves also reported the boost this project gave them. In particular, how they felt after a performance or residency workshop, when they could observe their dancers and the responses of the audiences.

- *“I think that is just an important point to be aware of this how important it is for the dancers to feel like they're getting something out of it. But also me as the artist I did come away buzzing and most of the I think pretty much all the performances I have as well.” (Artist)*



Photograph 2 Group performance at Dance Re:Ignite Festival 2024

Increased Connections

Sharing stories as part of the co-creation process engendered a feeling of being heard and valued. For example, in the Watford group discussions, participants increasingly shared perspectives on leaving original homelands and finding new homes and communities in Watford, including transforming identities. This shared experience enabled deeper connections among the group.

The interviewed Volunteer Dancers talked about the opportunities the project gave them for social connection and how that benefited them. They all talked about the co-creation process and how that enabled them to get to know their dance group beyond surface level interactions, with trust and mutual support growing over time.

- *“Through that process of sharing stories, I felt more connected with my dance mates.” (Volunteer Dancer)*

- *“It actually enabled me to get to know these ladies better... it becomes a much more supportive group.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

They felt their groups became places where they felt safe to be vulnerable and to open up, they described how this process had deepened their connections into friendships.

- *“We encouraged each other. We were all shy at first, but we got there.”* (Volunteer Dancer)
- *“We’ve become friends. It’s a supportive group.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

Additionally, this looked like care and support when performing on tour. One volunteer dancer described the fact that it did not matter if the dance was perfect, which allowed for them to be able to support each other if someone forgot their movements.

- *“It’s not supposed to be perfect. Sometimes someone’s lost, and you just give a nudge. That makes it more authentic.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

This group support was observed by the artists as well with one describing a moment during a performance where the dancers were looking out for each other. One dancer kept ensuring the choreography didn’t block those who were dancing seated.

- *“And I noticed [one dancer], sort of hugging [another dancer] and saying thank you for making that point for me and caring about me so much.”* (Artist)

One of the groups had additional technical and logistics support, provided by a family member of one of the artists. In addition to providing tech support for the performances, they would often drive Volunteer Dancers to performance venues. This in itself offered an opportunity for deeper connection between the dancers and the technical support assistant.

- *“They talk about me a lot of the time. I might ask for advice or they just give it to you. They’re very interested to know what I’m going to do with my life. And they like to give stories from their lives. They just help me out really and I do find it really helpful.”* (Technical Assistant)

This relationship also provided insight into the increasing confidence of the Volunteer Dancers, not just in their dance but within themselves.

- *“They tell me every week how much they love it and how much it’s helped them...just become more confident in their own lives as well because of that. It really helps them to get out of bed and go and do something that’s in a group setting because it’s so hard for older people to find a sense of community if they’re just isolated.”* (Technical Assistant)



Photograph 3 Group performance at Dance Re:Ignite Festival 2024

8.1.2 Performances and Residencies

Performance Audiences

Despite being one off activities, the artists and Volunteer Dancers both observed audience responses to the dances and workshops. In particular, they noticed that the format of the performance and workshop, and using personal stories as the stimulus for creation, the audiences would offer stories about themselves, quite often sharing something that others did not know about them.

- *"And just really, it was great to see them sort of relate to each other on a completely different level, knowing something else about them. Because often the conversations are like here and now, maybe like grandchildren and things like that, family."* (Artist)
- *"The storytelling was really welcomed by the groups visited and, on several occasions, a support worker would say, 'I never knew that about' and that the creative process facilitating that."* (Artist)

One artist noted that by framing questions around what they felt proud of, enabled the audience to think about things in their own lives they were proud of. This elicited a number of responses, some which were surprising to others and some that may not have been 'high profile' but still made them feel proud, nonetheless. This framing in turn enabled the group to celebrate the audience members and their achievements.

- *"We had one lady who was in the civil service and one of her duties had been to escort Nelson Mandela to visit the Queen. And we had another lady that had had a stroke in the 1990s...but before she had the stroke, she was playing football for Spurs. So she was really sort of playing*

quite a high level sport, which is brilliant. And then there were even people that perhaps didn't have quite so sort of high profile things. For example, there was a lady there whose husband had owned a hardware shop and so she was sort of talking about that. (Artist)

These stories connected the audience members to each other, and to the Volunteer Dancers. They also served to value and celebrate the identities of the individuals contributing.

Residencies

The Residencies also had impact on wellbeing, both for the Volunteer Dancers who supported the residencies and the audience participants in those residencies. The primary impact that was noticed was that some audience participants would open up over time, both in sharing more about themselves and taking part in dance. For example, one participant got so involved over time in the movement he did a version of the 'worm'.

- *"So that was really a kind of highlight um of the time that we've spent with them really just him really coming out of his shell um and doing things that they'd (the carers) never seen before (Artist)*

Artists, Volunteer Dancers and partners observed the social and emotional benefits of the regular workshops with the groups. These included enjoyment from the participants, with smiles laughter and active participation common themes.

- *"I was chatting to one person, he was so jolly looking, he gave me joy. He said, you're such a jolly lot, you're much better than puzzles they usually bring us. That is brilliant. He said, you want you to come again, you bring a lot of happiness." (Volunteer Dancer)*
- *"How happy they were at the end of the session when at first they didn't want to take part." (Volunteer Dancer)*

Physical benefits of the workshops and residencies were also noted. The wellbeing lead from care home commented on the nature of the participation the project encouraged.

- *"This group never get up and get this lively. So it was really like it's been a boost, like a motivation for them to get up. And the atmosphere was great. We have sing-alongs but nobody gets up or moves." (Partner)*

The creative element was also noted by partners, who valued the opportunity it gave the participants to think creatively and do something different to their normal routine.

- *"Our group enjoyed the dancing, the group work, the creative thinking that was involved." (Partner)*
- *"Some were perplexed about what a 'small joy' was. Not often asked that question I suspect. But most eager to think of things once they understood. I got a rather grumpy man to get up and dance a drinking beer dance. Much to his pleasure as he was clapped!!" (Volunteer Dancer)*

The impact on artists and Volunteer Dancers was also described. The residencies contributing to wellbeing by providing enjoyment, pride and a sense of connection with the audience participants.

- *"Even if it's just for a little bit, seeing someone shine—that's what gives me the most pleasure." (Volunteer Dancer)*
- *"It's a real privilege and a pleasure to meet these lovely people. They give us more than we give them." (Volunteer Dancer)*
- *"It was such a privilege to do the workshops, and we got a lot out of it, and we believe the people did to." (Volunteer Dancer)*

This was also the case for staff in the care homes and day centres who connected with the project.

- *"At the end of session three, we had one of the staff, one of the carers said, thank you for that. And thank you for involving the carers too, because it's important for us to have something enjoy." (Artist)*

Giving back to the community was referenced by a number of Volunteer Dancers as being one of the main benefits of the project.

- *“To see the joy of the audiences and knowing how proud it made me. Feeling that you have achieved something good.”* (Volunteer Dancer)
- *“Working with others creatively, giving back to the community, feeling part of something. Developed self esteem.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

One Volunteer Dancer summed up that they saw as the main benefits of the project being the opportunity to connect with others and feeling like they belonged, as well as giving back to the community.

- *“I took pride in being part of a project that brought some enjoyment to others in the community. It's good to feel a sense of belonging, and commitment to everyone taking part.”* (Volunteer Dancer)



Photograph 4 Group Performance at Dance Re:Ignite Festival 2024

8.2 Dance Infrastructure and Hyper Local Working

8.2.1 Cross-sector partnerships

BEEE Creative aims to connect artists, practitioners and cross-sector partners so that anyone, regardless of their stage of life or personal circumstances, can take part in dance, in a way that works for them. They have identified that to reach those historically underserved and have had less opportunity to engage in this type of work, they need to work hyper locally. To do this, BEEE Creative has built on the work of previous Dance Re:Ignite iterations and further expanded and developed cross-sector partnerships. These partners include care homes, schools, libraries, and lunch clubs. They have also built and developed relationships with county wide partners such as Herts Sports Partnership and Age UK Hertfordshire, who were able to support and broker relationships on a hyper local level.

Deeper, Stronger Partnerships

In this project BEEE Creative have worked with more partners than in previous iterations with the extended tour schedule and increased number of groups performing. They have noticed during this project a greater awareness of who they are.

- *"I just seem to have a lot of conversations at the moment where I say, 'I work for BEEE Creative,' and the person I'm speaking to, are saying, 'oh yeah we've heard of them,' So we're infiltrating."* (Project Manager)

The length of time of the project has also supported the ongoing development of relationships allowing for deeper conversations about the work, rather than a more transactional booking in a tour performance. This has provided the opportunity for partners to learn about the project part way through as there was still time to be involved. It has also led to learning from partners, for example from Age UK and working with people with dementia.

- *"I'm thinking about the conversations I have now every week I go into the Age UK group and the learning I'm getting from them about working with their participants with dementia."* (BEEE Creative Director)

The partnership development has enabled BEEE Creative to think more creatively about how they can align their priorities and activities to campaigns delivered by partners such as Live Longer Better³, and Age Friendly⁴.

Seeing the Value

The partners too want to continue to develop their relationship with BEEE Creative. Each of the partners interviewed or who responded to questions via email expressed a desire to work with BEEE Creative again. Words like *amazing, lovely, brilliant energy, and inspiring* were used repeatedly in the feedback. The partners could see the value in the project, and the benefits to their stakeholders.

As identified in previous projects, explaining the concept of the project to those unfamiliar in participatory arts is challenging. BEEE Creative described times when it was challenging to 'cross the threshold' of a potential partner. For some this may have been due to a lack of understanding the project. It is known that once a partner (or participant) experiences the project, they understand its value. BEEE Creative has explored a number of ideas to try to help explain the project to the uninitiated with limited success.

- *"I think that's a really, really crucial thing is that actually no amount of describing or links to video if it just seems to work until people have experienced it."* (Director)

Therefore, developing those ongoing relationships increasing word of mouth will support this. BEEE Creative is also considering creating resources for its website that provide examples of what a performance or a workshop might look like.

The role of the Artist and Volunteer Dancer

It was acknowledged that the artists have a particular part to play in developing partnership relationships at a hyper local level. As described by BEEE Creative, they can manage the administration of partnerships to a degree, but they do require the support of the artists. While not wanting to give the artists too much administrative onus, BEEE Creative recognised that working hyper locally meant it was usually better for artists to shoulder some of this as *they're continuously living*

³ The Live Longer Better campaign aims to enable people to live better for longer. <https://www.livelongerbetter.uk/mission>

⁴ The Centre for Aging Better has established a network of Age Friendly communities to encourage better networked provision for older people. <https://ageing-better.org.uk/uk-network-age-friendly-communities>

and working in those districts so they have more up-to-date and knowledge in terms of groups and community groups or venues that are around or what's happening and their own relationships with those places. (BEEE Creative Project Manager)

Similarly, the Volunteer Dancers have played a role in connecting the project to potential partners. Volunteer Dancers with links to care homes – through former colleagues, friends who are staff, and friends who are clients – have brokered those initial relationships. Their knowledge of local groups, activities and community centres has been a key ingredient in working so locally.

- *"One of our dancers had a friend in the nursing home and it was her friend's birthday. So she was able to pop up and see her, and thought she wasn't ready to come down for the workshop. But I think it just comes back to that hyper-local thing that I probably haven't really discussed at all, the fact that people have connections with other people." (Artist)*

8.2.2 Developing community dance infrastructure

An integral part of hyper local working is the development of community dance infrastructure in those areas. In addition to the benefits local artists bring it is necessary for those artists to have the skills to work co-creatively with older people and adults with learning disabilities.

Artist Development over time

Since its founding BEEE Creative has worked to identify and develop local dance artists, to ensure the viability of this infrastructure. All of the dance artists on this project have experience working in this way, some with very deep knowledge and expertise. Pairing the dance artists with a visual artist provided an opportunity for development for both.

- *"For me, it was really exciting to see, to work with a dance practitioner, but also combine those ideas and thoughts with the participants, you know, to kind of share all that sort of vision together." (Visual artist)*

This was valued across each group, with some pairing forging deep partnership approaches.

- *"One of the highlights was collaborating with somebody, because most of the rest of all, in fact, all of my other work, I work on my own. So this was a really new environment for me to work in." (Dance Artist)*

Skills Development

Adding a visual artist in to the commissioning phase, gave all artists, regardless of experience, the opportunity to deepen their skills. By working in satellites but connected to the BEEE Creative 'hub' the artists are able to network with each other and when possible, share practice and troubleshoot. This has not always been practical, and future iterations of the project may wish to provide more built-in opportunities to connect. Working with these artists over a period of time, on the different iterations of Dance Re:Ignite has also allowed for the artists to engage their established groups with this project, while still being open to new participants.

- *"I felt like I was part of a creative team with us and the dancers. And I had so many more ideas and influences, and I felt very supported in that." (Dance Artist)*

9 Analysis of Practice: Conditions for Co-Creation

The following section aims to explore BEEE Creative's practice and analyse the qualities of that practice that enables it to have the impact it does. To do this, it will consider the conditions of co-creation it creates and how this is linked to the conditions required to work hyper locally. This section will mostly focus on the co-creation practice that took place within the development of the dance pieces. It will also highlight where these principles were applied in performances and residencies. The

following themes have been identified through the discussions from the Symposium, and interviews and conversations with artists, partners, Volunteer Dancers and BEEE Creative.

9.1 Inclusivity and Applicability

A primary tenet of co-creation is that it is as inclusive as possible. It aims to be non-hierarchical, finding ways to ensure all stakeholders can make equally valued contributions. However, this process takes time for a 'space' for people to feel safe to share, express and listen to be established. The artists on this project are experienced in working with participants in this way. They are experienced in holding space, listening and including. Consideration was given to the needs of the Volunteer Dancers. These were continually reflected on throughout the project, with adjustments made to ensure continued participation was possible.

One of the challenges of this project was the different starting points of the Volunteer Dancers at the start of the project. Some of whom has taken part in previous projects like this, who were more used to the inquiry led co-creation process and others who were new to it. For some of those dancers, they needed support to trust in the process, and then to open up and contribute to the process. One artist described challenges initially around this, both in terms of unequal contributions from dancers, as well as dancers just giving opinions, rather than suggestions. The artist had to develop and implement strategies that addressed both of these issues, in order for the co-creation to continue.

This ethos applied beyond the development of the dance but in the performances and residencies, saw that audiences and participants felt valued and included. Their ideas brought into the workshops, their stories shared and listened to.

- *"There is no discrimination, it's inclusive and interactive for all to feel comfortable to join in."* (Partner)

The activities that were developed for the workshops could be adapted to meet the needs of participants, regardless of age or ability. For example, it was noted that music played a significant role, making the activity universally engaging.

- *"They can still be included in anything 'music and movement!'"* (Partner – referring to people with physical disabilities)

There was an applicability to the performance and workshops. They were as successful in care homes as they were in a Primary school.

- *"I've been to care homes, I've been to a primary school, obviously the festival that was a mixed audience and every time everybody loves it."* (Technical Assistant)
- *"It was great for the children to see that anyone can dance and perform regardless of age."* (School Partner)

9.2 Curiosity, Flexibility and Openness

Co-creation requires flexibility and openness. This begins with the administration and project management, building the project and involving partners and recruiting participants.

- *"The relationship building at a local level, it's bespoke to how they receive the information best and who they actually have most direct contact with."* (BEE Creative Director)

The Project Manager described needing to be flexible and open in liaising with each of the different groups, they had to adapt to the different ways of working for each artist, who in turned took a similar approach with their Volunteer Dancers.

Flexibility was a continued requirement for the co-creation of the performances. The artists worked to meet the dancers where they were, rather than expecting them to be at the same starting point. This

required patience and adaptability. This flexibility was also a requirement of the Volunteer Dancers. While it was challenging for some initially, for the co-creation space, they needed to let go of preconceived ideas about what the final output might be which for some was a challenge initially. Other dancers wanted more openness and less certainty. It was a challenging balance to achieve at times, as outlined in the following description of once dance group.

- *“The basis of the conflict was ‘organic vs formulaic’. One participant voiced a concern that she had about the whole process and feels strongly that it is being dictated to them and leaving them out of the selective process and allowing the work to grow organically. At the complete opposite end of the spectrum, we have 3 who argued back that for them to feel comfortable they need decisions to be made, otherwise they feel lost/directionless (particularly when they are anxious about their memory) and another not wanting to feel stupid in front of an audience. The space of play leaves them uncertain with what is going on.”*

The role of the dance artists in maintaining a space of flexibility and openness is central to co-creation. This will be explored further in [The role of the artist](#).

9.3 Process and Product

As has been discussed above, some Volunteer Dancers were initially more focused on the performance, or ‘product’ than the process of creating the project. One artist’s observations described three dancers who were very focused on structure, rules and timings feeling frustrated with the experimental process of playing with ideas and developing the choreography organically. They were reassured that it was normal to ‘make a mess’ and explore unfinished ideas when developing choreography, and not to worry as a firm structure would be pulled together later.

A shared reflection from the volunteer dancer interviews was an acceptance that their dance was not ‘perfect’. They were proud of what they had produced but knew it was not a ‘polished’ professional performance.

- *“It didn’t matter if we got it wrong. We just kept on going. Nobody minded.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

The Volunteer Dancers spoke very little about the performance itself but rather focused on the experience of creating it and touring it, when asked about their experience of the project. They could see the value in the process of creating, and what that experience gave them.

- *“It’s not about being perfect. It’s about being present.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

9.4 Trust, Exchange and Mutual Learning

A recurring theme that each stakeholder identified was the requirement for trust. This is crucial for the creation of an inclusive space. It allows for mutual communication which in turn allows for exchange of ideas and shared learning.

- *“And so I feel like I’m creating a space where there’s nothing that’s wrong. And whatever they offer is valuable. And so then when it comes to the question of what makes you happy, have a chat with your partner and tell them what makes you happy and then maybe we’ll be able to create a movement from that.”* (Artist)

The development of trust and exchange then effected the benefit of not only the Volunteer Dancers feeling comfortable to share their emotions and deepened their connections, but they were also able to use that to support the creation of the dance.

- *“Dancing and working together help us share our feelings and emotions, we got to know one another much better. We share our similarities and accept our differences, and as such that enable us to blend our thoughts and dance movements into a performance.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

- *“Listening to one another with respect, valuing and appreciating each person's input. Having fun and allowing time for exploration of ideas.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

Different layers of trust were developed in the project. For the Volunteer Dancers, they learned to trust each other with their stories and vulnerabilities. They also had to trust the process. The project partners also were required to trust this process.

- *“There is a leap of faith organisations are having to take in programming this work and trusting an organisation that we're new to them.”* (BEEE Creative Director)

Through this process the Volunteer Dancers were able to better understand each other's differences and learn from them.

- *“She [volunteer dancer] said it a few times, you know, she was very... she was remarking on, you know, ‘wow, we've all got such different responses to things.’”* (Artist)

9.5 Creative Stimulus

While co-creation is a collaborative process that factors in the ideas and creativity of each stakeholder, there needs to be starting point. Usually, this starting point comes from a creative stimulus. In this project, during the creation of the dances the stimulus came through telling of the dancers' stories, that began with a theme or visual images. Warmups used creative prompts to ease people into co-creation.

- *“A game we used to introduce the idea of stories to movement was ‘this is not a stick’ which everyone had a go with and we put all their ideas together as a warm-up ‘routine.’”* (Artist)

In the workshops and residencies, the small moments of co-creation came through the stimulus of the dance. It was observed that music was quite often the most powerful stimulus to encourage participation from those more reluctant to join in.

- *“Music choice plays a big part – taking time to get to know participant preferences and incorporating that into the session but also have a variety of music types.”* (Artist)
- *“The music helped. They liked Elvis, Queen, disco. It brought them out.”* (Volunteer Dancer)

Stories from both artists and dancers provided examples of participants in the residencies not taking part until they hear a song they liked, or an artist they admired.

- *We found kind of a way to engage with him and managed to do that. It was, it felt really rewarding and now we know what kind of music we can use to help him feel like he can contribute.* (Artist)

In this particular example this resident who had not engaged until they played music he liked, remained in the circle the entire session and danced in the middle of the circle three times. He contributed a movement to a group he was working with. The manager of his care home highlighted the significance of his participation as it aligned with his target goal of group integration, marking a substantial improvement from his usual self-isolating behaviour.

9.6 Modelling

The artist reflections and the interviews with the Volunteer Dancers highlighted another element of co-creation for this project that was not identified in the symposium. In this project co-creation needs to be shared and modelled for others to understand it in practice, beyond the theoretical. The artists, through their facilitation and approach, were able to model this practice, so that the Volunteer Dancers were also able to contribute to the workshops and residencies using the same principles.

The Volunteer Dancers were supported to trust the process and then to use a similar approach in their workshops and the residencies.

- *“It really did help to have our dancers there who are experienced in turning stories into movement as well.” (Artist)*

The dancers themselves were able to speak confidently about how they approached the workshops, to support the participants and to encourage their engagements.

- *“We take small groups each. That helps people open up who might not want to share in a big group.” (Volunteer Dancer)*

The artists observed the confidence of their dancers, in their interaction with the participants, and leading elements of the workshops.

- *“I had four of my group come with me last week and four come with me this week and they're really good at sort of motivating people and going around and getting people joining in so I don't really have to worry about them so which is which is brilliant and although I'm sort of leading the whole sort of the over structure they're sort of leading little .” (Artist)*

An additional layer to the modelling is the dancers themselves and how they related to the participants in the workshops and residencies. They are ‘ordinary’ people who are taking part; dancing and creating. This supported the participants to feel more at ease.

- *“We’re not posh. We’re just normal people. That’s why they open up to us.” (Volunteer Dancer)*

There was a relatability to the dancers that resonated with the older audiences and inspired the younger ones.

- *“The BEEE dancers interacted directly with the residents, and this made a huge difference.” (Project Partner)*

9.7 Enjoyment and Fun

Artists, dancers and partners alike have each described the enjoyment and joy they have derived from the project.

- *“I don't think any of us have laughed so much in a long time, so that was the particular highlight of the session, laughing in a good way, laughing along, sharing jokes and joy through the whole session. (Artist)*

They have found the project fun to be part, oftentimes describing moments as joyful. This sense of play is established at the start of the sessions.

- *“Starting with icebreaker movement games/props – to set a tone that is light-hearted and fun and gets everyone engaging with each other. Not taking ourselves seriously.” (Artist)*

The dancers reflected on how much they enjoyed taking part. It was observed that this supported the co-creation process to feel easy and enjoyable.

- *“I think their energy is just contagious because everybody's just laughing and smiling and yeah and you've come away from it feeling great as well.” (Technical Assistant)*

9.8 Time, Reflection and Iteration

Time is needed to build trust and relationships. Time is needed to ensure all voices are heard in the creation process. Time is required to meet people where they are and bring them into the process on their terms. Time is required to create a piece that incorporates everyone’s voices. Artists and dancers both felt they would have benefited from more time to create the piece.

- *“I needed more time to create.” (Artist)*

However, one dancer did feel there was time built into the sessions to explore, without pressure.

- *“We had time to explore. No pressure. That’s what made it work.” (Volunteer Dancer)*

Space and time to try, fail, and succeed is required and reflection on those successes and challenges is needed, in order to iterate and develop. One artist reflected on giving themselves more time to work

with ideas and then giving time for participants to step back and observe what is happening, and then to feed back.

- *“I know I need to allow more time for playing with ideas before selecting...give more time allowing participants to sit out and observe what is happening and feeding back to each other about what is working or can be developed. (Artist)”*



Photograph 5 Group performance at Dance Re:Ignite Festival 2024

9.9 The role of the artist

The artist plays an integral role in facilitating the co-creation in the space. While co-creation aims to be non-hierarchical, in projects like this, there does need to be a role that can hold the space. The artists brought far more than their skills as dancers. They also used a variety of strategies and approaches that established trust in an inclusive environment.

Calm

The Volunteer Dancers described what it was about their artists that encouraged them. While each artist is different, there was a similarity to their approach. They used words like *calm*, *supportive* and *reassuring*. They described the *enabling approach of the artist*, which they felt empowered them.

- *“[Artist] is incredibly gentle with us. She leads us into it.”*
- *“[Artist] has a very relaxed manner of approach and develops it gradually.”*
- *“Calm, supportive, reassuring, enabling approach of the artist/ dance facilitator.”*

Responsive

In interviews and reflections, the artists implicitly described their approach and a theme that came from each was their responsiveness to the dancers. This could be described as ‘reading the room’, such as watching out for how they are engaging, both intellectually and physically, and being ready to adapt as needed.

- *“...the energy levels, how they engage, mood etc. and be ready to take this off in any direction! This also includes watching out for how they respond physically as individuals.” (Artist)”*

This also included being watchful for contributions that might not be obvious and incorporating them into the wider group's work.

- *"...picking up on movements, however slight and gently building that into the movement vocabulary of an activity – incorporating their movements into dance and thanking them for their contributions."* (Artist)

Encouraging

The dancers felt very supported by their artists, they felt that their contributions were valued. The artists described moments where they would gently encourage their dancers who in turn would encourage each other.

- *"...if someone's doing a move I haven't seen, I'm kind of like, oh, let's join in with them. She's got a lovely move going on. And so I'm trying to empower them as participants as the session's going on. I'm trying to value every contribution I opened."* (Artist)

"Loose" Framework

The artists regularly referred to having a plan and having to change their approach. In their reflections they seemed generally unphased by this. This approach was necessary for co-creation, the dancers needed a framework to work within, but the freedom to explore ideas and to reflect.

- *"Having a plan and lots of activity on the ready but then being led by those in the room."* (Artist)

One artist described the framework they used was just framing the sessions in something that was familiar and routine, using micro rituals to punctuate the framework.

- *Having a framework to the overall session that becomes familiar and routine. Having an end ritual (taken from Moving Memory!) that ends every session – e.g. passing a signed 'thank you' around the room...that we all did together that ends with clapping for yourself and everyone in the room."* (Artist)

Reflective

The observation journals the artists completed, and in their interviews, demonstrated the deep reflection they did from session to session. The artists documented where they felt they had had successes, and where they felt that had not. On those occasions, they reflected on why things may not have gone to plan and worked through potential ways to address it in future sessions. A common theme in these reflections was that there was always a curiosity in how to improve or address needs that arose.

10 Challenges

The project was not without its challenges. The challenges below, some of which have been referenced throughout this report, span the different elements of the project including delivery, project management and recruitment.

Recruitment

The nature of BEEE Creative's work makes it challenging to describe. Often, those who do try to describe it suggest the only way to understand it is to do it. Those who 'cross the threshold' to experience their work, usually stay and become advocates. While this is a strong endorsement for the work, encouraging those who may not be familiar with their way of working to engage is challenging. This includes participants and partners. As BEEE Creative expands the partners it works with, particularly those with little community dance experience, this challenge will continue.

Specialist Approach

Some of the tours visited care homes that specialised in Dementia care. This proved to be challenging for some of the groups, which impacted the dancers. One visit was described by an artist as *it probably wasn't our most successful one*. The artist described a lack of engagement which made the session more challenging to deliver.

- *"But my group sort of battled through it and we hope that somebody got something out of it. But I think my group sort of came away feeling a bit not so good about that one, because it had been quite hard work."* (Artist)

Another group had a residency with a care home for residents with Dementia. In this instance, the artist inverted the offer, so that the residency took place first. The performance and workshop was delivered at the end of the residency. While this was not without its challenges, this allowed both the residents to become more familiar with the artist and dancers, it also allowed the dancers to become more familiar with the residents and ways of working with them.

Support systems

The artists all valued the additional support the visual artist gave them. However, they still felt they would have benefited from more support from each other. While they recognised they could do this on their own accord, they wanted a more formalised network with the other artists, so they felt less isolated.

The artists also felt the need for more support on tour and residencies. One artist was able to convene further support (technical and dance) and found this made a significant difference to how they were able to manage the tour. While this was a solution that worked in this instance, there is a financial challenge to enable this across the different groups.

Trusting the Process

Similar to the challenge for recruitment was the challenge of supporting new dancers to trust the process. In the initial stages, these dancers needed more careful support, to enable them to trust and enjoy the process, but also to ensure the other dancers were also protected. This took time away from the development of the dance pieces.

- *"We had a few new dancers this year and with that came an element of some of their behaviours, some of their responses to groups and situations became quite needed a lot of my time to manage."* (Artist)

This uncertainty was not limited to new dancers, but also to longer standing dancers from established groups, but were new to Dance Re:Ignite.

- *"A couple of longer standing participants went into a panic about what is it we are actually doing...A certain amount of anxiety now that there is a sense that we are creating a performance piece - lots of questions about where performances would be and how that would work, how we chose places, what we were doing. Also, stating that they don't understand what it is that we are making. In the context of co-creation - the not knowing and allowing space to play creates anxiety for participants who are much more used to coming and working in a much more defined structure."* (Artist)

Additionally, while the dance artists on this project are used to this way of working, it was a different approach for some of the visual artists, particularly those who are used to working towards a finished product. While the artists were able to grow with this process, it was a challenge for them initially.

- *"[Visual artist] spoke openly about the vulnerability she feels as an artist working the way we are. This specifically relates to not coming to a session with a finished article and instead bringing something in that has responded to the groups ideas but may or may not work - allowing time for playing, adapting and failing."* (Artist)

Length of the Tour

In previous iterations, the dancers found the short but packed length of the tour challenging. To address this, the tours for this iteration were longer, allowing for dancer and partner availability where possible. However, both dancers and artists found that the tour was too drawn out at times. They felt the tour lost the initial energy and momentum. Furthermore, some dancers became anxious about remembering their dance and what they needed to do. They recognised there is a balance to be struck about not overextending the tour, but also not retracting the time so that the commitment becomes too intense.



Photograph 6 Group performance at Dance Re:Ignite Festival 2024

11 Conclusion

Dance Re:Ignite 4.0 has certainly delivered on its aim to increase the reach and access to high quality dance experiences for older adults and disabled adults in local communities in Hertfordshire. Dance infrastructure in the towns in the targeted towns has been strengthened. In those places there are now stronger communities of older dancers, and more cross-sector partners supporting the work. This project has reached more people than any previous iteration and has done so by taking a hyper-local partnership led approach. There has been tangible impact on the wellbeing of the Volunteer Dancers, both self-reported and observed, and this has extended to observations of participant audiences, with examples of increased sense of identity and being valued shared.

It has also explored the role of co-creation and co-production in this project, and for BEEE Creative as an organisation. Through this exploration it has enabled BEEE Creative to better understand the conditions that are required to support their co-creation approach, and what challenges and barriers there are to ensuring those conditions are in place.

12 Recommendations

The following recommendations are focus on considerations for iteration and growth as well as suggestions for adjustments to the delivery.

12.1 Strategic: iteration and growth

Scale and replicate the model. Considering the growth of the project and its hub and spoke model, future iterations of this work could take place beyond Hertfordshire. The infrastructure and network that has now been developed through this project could provide the foundational support to expand into neighbouring counties.

Increase artist networking and peer support. Artist support is a tenet of BEEE Creative's practice, but time for more networking would be valuable. This would support:

- Practice sharing, especially around co-creation and its process.
- Training and support for artists where the work will take them into dementia specialist care homes, or working with adults with learning disabilities

Build on the partnerships leveraging those who 'know' BEEE's work to support and advocate the work to new potential partners.

Explore the impact on not just how others see older people as a result of the project but the impact on participants' own sense of identity and how they see themselves.

12.2 Operational: delivery adjustments and adaptations

Consider building in **more delivery support for the Dance Artists** when on tour. This role could provide additional pastoral, technical and administrative support.

Review the length of the tour. There is a balance yet to be found about the length and timing of the tour. Previously, when the tour length was shorter, but with a lot of performances packed in, Volunteer Dancers found this challenging. This project the tour was drawn out and the Volunteer Dancers felt they lost momentum and were anxious about forgetting the dance.

Consider **creating a film** that documents or explains the process of the project to enable those new to it – potential participants or partners – to be able to conceptualise it, increasing buy-in.

July 2025
Kirsten Hutton
Independent Evaluator

13Bibliography

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14Appendix A – Activities Matrix

Outcome	Indicators of Success	Measurement Tools
Participants		
Through co-creation and cross-sector partnerships, develop greater equity in the local dance sector by developing community dance infrastructure in targeted towns in Hertfordshire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants respond positively to the experience• Participants with little or no dance experience take part and indicate likelihood of continued engagement• 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baseline, endpoint surveys• Artist and evaluator observations• Attendance data• Demographic data
Increased feelings of wellbeing in participants and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants identify feeling valued and heard• Participants identify feeling more connected to each other and their community• Participants feel celebrated• Partners and artists observe increases in participant feelings of wellbeing• Skills development	
Increase reach and remove barriers to engagement, particularly for older adults and adults with disabilities with limited access to activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up to 50% participants have not taken part in a BEEE Creative or dance project before	
Artists		
Through co-creation and cross-sector partnerships, develop greater equity in the local dance sector by developing community dance infrastructure in targeted towns in Hertfordshire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase feelings of connection with other artists in Hertfordshire and beyond• Increase connection with cross-sector partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Baseline and endpoint surveys• Check ins• Reflection diaries and observations
Increase reach and remove barriers to engagement, particularly for older adults and adults with disabilities with limited access to activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop skills in community dance practice, working with older adults and adults with disabilities• Increase likelihood of offering dance opportunities for older adults and adults with disabilities	
Partners		

Outcome	Indicators of Success	Measurement Tools
Through co-creation and cross-sector partnerships, develop greater equity in the local dance sector by developing community dance infrastructure in targeted towns in Hertfordshire.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of the value of dance for health and wellbeing • Increase likelihood of re-engaging with BEEE Creative and dance artists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endpoint surveys/interviews • Participation data
Increase reach and remove barriers to engagement, particularly for older adults and adults with disabilities with limited access to activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of barriers to engagement by different partners and how they might support addressing those barriers • Increase support for BEEE Creative to increase reach and engagement 	