

Dancing Moments

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Dancing Moments, a creative South Asian dance participation project, has used dance as a tool for communication and improving physical fitness, to restore wellbeing for people in the early stages of dementia and their carers.

Led by Bisakha Sarker, artistic director of Chaturangan, *Dancing Moments* was conceived and delivered in partnership with Akademi South Asian Dance UK and Arts 4 Dementia. Sessions were delivered at The Bull Theatre in Barnet, by a team of professional South Asian dancers and musicians.

Dementia changes behavioural patterns, making people seem isolated and withdrawn, requiring loved ones to find different ways of connecting with them.

For people who can recall past events but find it hard to remember, it is important to

develop dance activities that are not dependant on memory, but can flow with creative and movement improvisation. This will help to restore confidence and self-esteem.

South Asian dance offers movements to suit all stages of dementia and levels of mobility (chair-based and upright). The narrative element intrinsic to South Asian dance opens up varying creative possibilities for the participant, keeping both body and mind actively engaged.

Dancing Moments showed that South Asian dance can provide a way to connect that is focussed on the individual and does not rely on memorising movement.

This resulting resource pack provides guidance on how to implement some of the *Dancing Moments* techniques in further work for people in the early stages of dementia and their carers.

The planning and delivery of *Dancing Moments* sessions were successfully aligned to the New Economic Foundations' recommended 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' framework;

Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give.

This pack aims to give carers and session leaders confidence and to further understanding of the use of South Asian dance techniques to encourage wellbeing.

The pack provides guidance on:

- The structure and planning of sessions using South Asian dance techniques and the underpinning intentions behind each section.

- A suggested session focussing on the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'.

- How to maintain and stimulate participants attention during the sessions.

- Evaluation practice.

This pack provides a guide not a template for working with dance and dementia. Being flexible and creative to changing situations is integral to the success of any

session. However, it is hoped that exercises and guidance given in this resource pack will boost confidence in both session leaders and participants.



Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning and Give are a set of five simple actions to improve well-being, identified by the New Economics foundation (nef), on the basis of the latest scientific evidence. Individuals are encouraged to build these evidence based actions into their

daily lives to improve their well-being. They are an invitation to take care of your relationships and be generous with the people around you, to keep fit by doing physical activity, to remain aware of the world around you and to keep challenging yourself by trying new things.

Introduction

Take time to establish initial connection with each person.

- Create dance activity to introduce names.
- Interactive conversation, to get to know participants.
- Greeting, with gentle touch when appropriate.

Namaskar

Establish body mind connection & awareness of Now and Here.

- Teach a short movement sequence, improvised or modified from dancer's own style.
- Centre the participant.
- Enable the person to find space around, above and under the feet.
- Touch the eyes and, if possible, the floor.

Warming up

Focus on different parts of the body to prepare it for movement.

Breathing exercise:

- Start with everyone seated comfortably in chairs. Invite participants to breathe normally, then slowly let them find the rhythm of their own breathing.
- Gradually introduce fingers, and then arm movements to the rhythm. Bring in eyes, eyebrows and, if appropriate, shoulder movements.

Physical exercise:

- Tap toes and heels. Stamp feet to rhythm. Introduce short rhythmic footwork from chairs, getting up if safe and appropriate.
- Guide participants to move about - mindful of all mobility concerns - around the chairs and in the space.



Always remember the five ways of wellbeing.

Movement motifs

Let music enter the body and establish a sense of rhythm.

Simple short movement motifs allowing participants to feel the music with different parts of the body, fingers, hands, elbows, arms, feet, knee, neck, shoulder and torso.

Vary the music speed. The playful energy of sudden and random changes enhances engagement with participants. This should be done with sensitivity so as not to confuse participants. and only when you have established a trusting relationship with them.

Teach basic movements.

Encourage improvisation to allow participants to be as creative as comfortable.

Movement motifs

Travelling movement in time with music. Hand gestures to play with shapes.

Travelling steps work better if there is a clear intention.

Avoid complex footwork, crossing legs or jumping, at least until a mental risk assessment of each participant's condition has been established.

Support and lead where necessary.

Teach easy *Mudras* (hand gestures) and how to dance with them.

Movement motifs

Inspire imagination and creativity through physical activity, encourage exploration of emotional expressions.

Give participants an incentive to move about.

Introduce simple narrative ideas to support improvisation.

Build these activities into a meaningful dance, where body movements and feelings come together to give full expression of the session.

Namaskar

Achieve a sense of completion.

Dance together and end the workshop by repeating the "Namaskar" movement.

End of the session

Evaluation

Let the group relax and share thoughts with each other.

Engage in conversation to introduce the participants and facilitator to each other.

Introduce simple breathing exercises to relax and get in touch with the rhythm of one's own breathing.

Add arm movements to visualise the rhythm of breathing, allowing participants to observe how our arms move – in unison – giving a sense of connection with each other, and of belonging.

Introduce movements to enable participants to connect physically by joining hands, linking arms, touching fingers to manifest a stronger sense of connectivity.

Give tasks that deliberately make eye contact.

Work in pairs or as a group, both seated and travelling about the studio, to allow participants to adjust their movements to each other's needs, and to feel a bond of being together.

Introduce boles (verbalised, rhythm patterns) and develop these into a call and response routine. The dance artist can improvise to the participant's rhythm pattern.

Encourage participants to make their own dance response to movement patterns created by other participants. Let them play back the rhythm of the dance artist's demonstration.

Use small bunches of *Ghungru* bells, *Dandia* sticks, or lolly sticks to make music or to respond to musical patterns.



Connect

Start sessions seated, breathing comfortably.

Teach *Mudras* (hand gestures), both single and double-handed. Add arm movements in different speeds, making sure that speeds are suitable for the group.

Introduce rhythm, with tasks to move fingers, hands, elbows, arms, shoulders, heads and feet to move to the given rhythm

For wheelchair users, give tasks to move around with the rhythm.

When possible, gradually introduce movements while standing near chairs.

Once participants become confident and it looks safe for them, teach them to try travelling steps.

Encourage participants to learn by mirroring movements.

Invite them to improvise and take simple creative

tasks, such as *'A bird is flying... Where is it flying?'* to which the reply could be *'Across the Mediterranean Sea to a land of sunshine'* or *'To see my granddaughter in Afghanistan'*. Whatever the idea, encourage and support participants to respond to the suggestion.

Create opportunities for participants to be active in body and mind.

Try simple short steps with rhythmic *Boles* at different speeds, while seated.

Give participants an opportunity to rest in between movement sessions.

Use imaginative props to encourage participants to move as much as possible.



● Introduce activities that use different senses to help participants Take Notice.

● Let them see how you breathe and dance.

● Give movements they can mirror and learn.

● Encourage participants to make music, and learn to listen and respond to music with movement.

● Use props with different textures to stimulate the sense of touch.

● Make instructions clear to help participants see and understand.

● Participants like to notice props, hand gestures and music.

● Stay alert to keep participants safe and comfortable.

● Perform for participants. This creates an opportunity for them to watch a professional performance. Dance is about non-verbal communication. Individuals will observe and notice different elements, according to their own choice.

● Notice participants' achievements and compliment them. Allow them to observe and complement each other's achievements.



Take Notice

Introduce new movements of varying complexity, to keep learning fun. Maintain a balance of movements that are easily achievable, with others that are challenging (but not unsuitable for the participant).

See that participants copy more accurately. Highlight teaching points to support learning. Have clarity in both the execution of the movement and accompanying step-by-step instruction.

Try mudras, both single and double-handed.

Introduce the participants to the art of verbalising simple, short rhythmic *Boles*.

Connect movements of hands, feet and shoulder to the rhythm to demonstrate how the rhythm, seeps through the body.

When appropriate, make references to the underpinning cultural background of South Asian dance.

People find it interesting to learn stories from across the world, especially if these can be expressed in dance.

Make sure that stories are not long or too wordy.



Keep Learning

Support each other to perform tasks.

Enable participants and facilitators to appreciate each other's contribution.

Encourage participants, volunteers and supporting artists to contribute movement ideas.

Invite participants and helpers to develop short dance sequences.

Allow each participant a moment to 'Give' by demonstrating a movement that the group can learn and enjoy.

Allow time in the dance session to rest and share stories and anecdotes from participants' life experiences, as well as what has been experienced in the session so far.

In partnered and group work, the idea of 'Giving' can be extended to smiling at each other, making eye contact and prompting each other to stimulate new movements.

Respond to humorous comments from participants sharing joy to enhance movement.



Give

Self-assessment is an essential tool for inner growth. Regular self and peer evaluation offer valuable insight in terms of both recognising the strength of the work delivered and its shortcomings. Artists are not medics. What they bring into the process of promoting health and wellbeing is emotional inspiration rather than clinical intervention. Therefore how the artist feels about the workshop is an indicator of how the session went.

After every session the artists should make brief notes (mental or otherwise) of their immediate response. If there is any scope for improvement in the external arrangements, such as space, accessibility, lighting, temperature, surrounding noise - potentially disturbing noise level - time, duration and need for additional care support, that should be reported back to the organisers.

For South Asian Dance artists this is a relatively new area of practice. It will improve their skills and confidence to identify activities, which were popular and beneficial for the participants (both the person with the condition and their carers). It is equally necessary to reflect on anything that did not seem satisfactory.

It is important to remember that there can be a number of options and opinions. No single method can be right for every participant and every situation. It is essential to be aware of alternative view points and test one's own methods against that. Being clear about one's own intention of using a particular activity makes it easier to amend or make adjustments, as and when necessary, for person-centred practice.

'Five Ways to Wellbeing' is a useful and relatively easy framework for collecting evidence of wellbeing outcomes.

Supporting South Asian Dance Artists:

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