



# **Dance Well Evaluation Report 2016 - 2019**

**Claire Farmer - Dance Well Project Officer**

# Preface

## From Akademi's Director, Mira Kaushik OBE

For over two decades, I have been fascinated by the intense power and impact of dance as a factor for improving wellness in older people. South Asian dance is unique in that typically, artists have more longevity as the practice itself focuses on the breath and combines that with an integral holistic consideration of yoga and Pilates which promotes care of the dancer's body.

Alongside my colleagues at Akademi, I have been creatively engaged with this area of working with dance to support people to feel less anxious and isolated through being part of social dancing and dance participation.

Our team has been at the forefront of devising artistic projects that encourage older people and people simply worried about their health, to consider dance and movement as a part of a lasting recovery. Many of our practitioners have benefitted from support from various funders, trusts and foundations (Baring Foundation, London Councils, Arts Council England, NIACE) which helped us with artist training and action learning to consolidate best practice around work with older adults.

Akademi has developed further work in the arts and health sector through grants for training artists, which supported us to have more confidence in working with people living with dementia, cardiovascular disease and pulmonary conditions. Akademi now works with major NHS sites through dance performance and participation programmes.

Akademi curated small projects addressing ageing and created case studies looking at how creative dance interventions alleviated mental health problems. We have also worked in highly-specialised partnerships, exploring how those with dementia are enlivened and re-awakened through dance and music triggers. Always considering sensitivities and emotions of people as they age and the experience of the carers around them, we have moved to professionalise our artists as a highly-trained workforce to go with confidence into care settings, recovery programmes, post-operative settings, hospital wards and day care, to work with empathy to establish professional programmes of highly-focused participation work.

Over the years we have assembled creative projects, for example working with chefs, gardeners, walking groups, film-makers and yoga practitioners to build wraparound programmes in communities. Akademi's outreach work, combined with our strong trusted partnerships with a range of health partners, will ensure that high-calibre interventions will be created by highly specialised, technically excellent dancers.

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## Dance Well: A 3-year journey of wellness and dancing stories

Dance Well was conceived as a project to aid the physical and mental wellbeing of older adults through the joy of movement, specifically South Asian dance inspired movements; born from prior Akademi projects including Ageing Artfully which combined dance, yoga and healthy eating. It was felt that dance forms such as Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Odissi, Kuchipudi and Bollywood, amongst others, offered specific nuances not necessarily found in other dance forms, that would be of benefit to the older generation.

Over the course of the last 3 years of Dance Well we have found this to be true, with Mudras offering participants the opportunity to exercise and articulate the sometimes stiff joints of the fingers and wrist. Mudras also provide the chance for participants to create stories, something that has been particularly well received by participants living with dementia.

Rhythms have also been integral to the enjoyment and integration of participants. As has been experienced through history, rhythm has an ability to bring people together in a common beat and often then leading to organic movement.

Dance has the ability to give an older person autonomy over their movement at a time in their lives when this may not be common, particularly for those in care settings or hospitals. Reconnecting with their body, rediscovering what it is capable of, can be an uplifting and joyous moment.

This short report will take you on our 3-year journey of wellness and dancing stories throughout our Dance Well project.





## Building the dance artist pool

Since its establishment 40 years ago, Akademi has supported, mentored, advised and showcased the next generation of classically-trained dance artists on their path to their professional careers. This has extended to our learning and participation work, ensuring the continuation of high quality service that Akademi provides across all work.

For Dance Well, this began in February 2016 with a 2-day training programme for dance artists interested in delivering workshops in schools and community settings. This training provided an overview of lesson planning as well as practical workshops with experienced dance for health practitioners, predominantly from a contemporary dance and creative movement background. At this early stage in the project it became clear that it was difficult for the South Asian dance artists to apply this information to their own dance practice, with very few examples of South Asian dance styles in health settings, particularly with people living with dementia.

From this initial training we were able to begin working with a small pool of dedicated dance artists who would later become integral to Akademi's training, educational resources and continued professional development opportunities for artists.

Throughout the first 2 years of Dance Well all artists underwent training focused on long term health conditions that they may face when working with older adults including how to work with people living with dementia and their carers, and what to be aware of when working with older adults who have undergone heart surgery, or are living with a respiratory disease that may require an oxygen tank. This has now developed into a comprehensive 2 day training package, underpinned by shadowing opportunities to gain experience within the settings.

The commitment and skill of this initial pool of dance artists led to further peer to peer training in years 2 and 3 of Dance Well. Their own experiences over the 2 years also led to the publication of the Dance Well resource book and 24 educational videos, with the aim to encourage and foster new dance artists from the South Asian dance sector to work in community participation.





## Dance Well Workshops

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## Arts 4 Dementia

2017, 2018

Archana Ballal and Rachel Waterman

Arts 4 Dementia are a UK charity working to provide training and develop arts programmes for those living with dementia and to empower and inspire people through artistic stimulation. Akademi partnered with Arts 4 dementia to deliver Dance Well workshops in 2017 and again in 2018.

To ensure quality of service both dance artists, Archana Ballal (2017) and Rachel Waterman (2018), attended Arts 4 Dementia's *Early-Stage Dementia Awareness Training for Arts Facilitators*.

Participants were recruited by Arts 4 Dementia staff, and carers were encouraged to attend so as to have a creative and fun experience together, removing the role of "carer" for the time they were in the room. We were delighted to see that the participants thoroughly enjoyed learning new movements and informed us that they wanted to learn a whole routine. They were also keen to perfect the movements, often chatting together and practicing the choreography whilst enjoying a cup of tea after the workshop.

Over the course of the 8 weeks, participants made new friendships with others in the group, with a gradual development of ease and rapport over the weeks. There was also a noticeable difference in carers' confidence and ability to relax during the classes. Over the weeks the group were more vocal in sharing their experiences and often waved at each other if a participant arrived late. In the final week they shared a short sequence with friends and family much to the delight of all the participants.

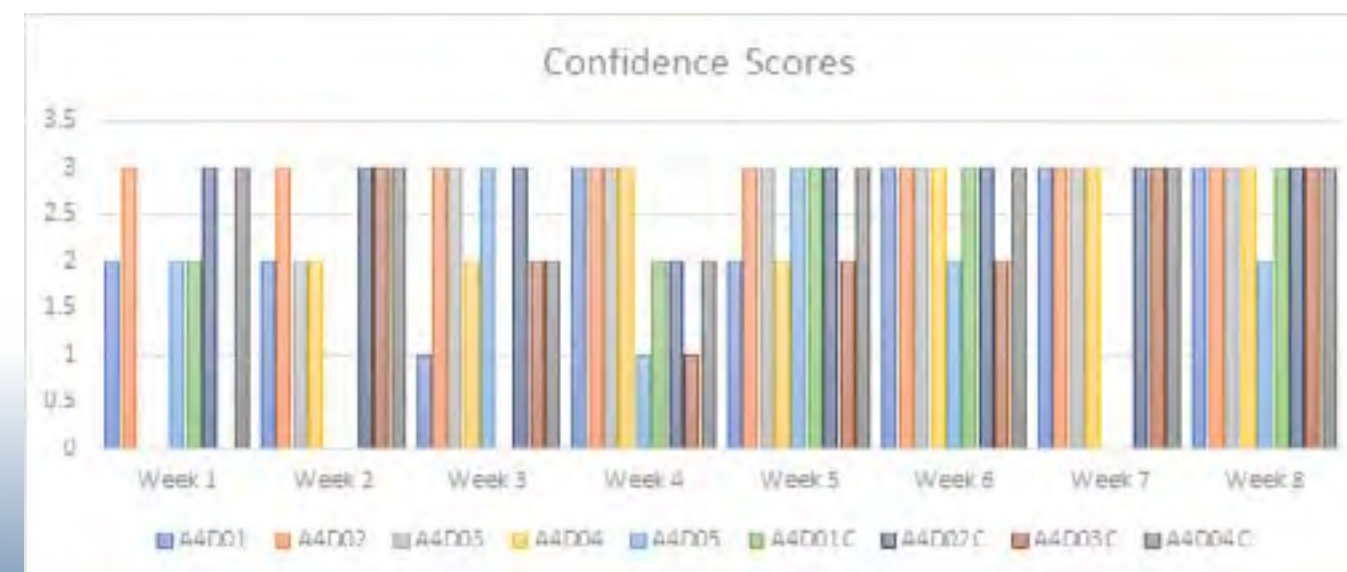
During the workshops in 2017 we trialled the use of the Arts Observation Scale (ArtsObs) (Fancourt, 2016) to measure engagement, levels of confidence and observational feedback on participants. Over the course of the eight weeks increases in participants' happiness scores was observed alongside more consistent levels of confidence towards the end of the programme.

Interaction between individuals increased across the course of the 8 weeks, with friendships and a rapport between the group developing, allowing for more creative expression and participants offering suggestions during the class.

Noticeable differences were apparent in all participants, but a few in particular showed marked differences between week one and week eight.

One particular participant to show an improvement, was a carer, P. Initially P was quite reserved, interacting only with his partner for the first few weeks. P took a keen interest in the mudras and their names and began to relax as the weeks went by. Although gradual, by week 7 P was smiling, laughing and engaging with others in the group, and enjoying some creative choreography with his partner whilst dancing with the scarves. In the final couple of weeks P ran underneath the parachute, swapping places with other participants and smiling broadly. In the final week P shared with the rest of the group that he and his partner had enjoyed the classes so much it had inspired them to look for other similar activities and they had signed up to Tai Chi classes.

***"It has been wonderful, I am so happy. The exercise helped my arthritis. They are fun and different."***





## Case study

Written by Giulia Ghinelli, Dance Well Project Assistant

Unlike the other participants, E came to the Dance Well workshop alone - without any carers or relatives. When she joined the group and started doing some exercises with the bells and hand gestures, she did not seem overly convinced on the usefulness of the workshop. She looked serious and gloomy, and didn't smile at all.

From the second session onwards, she became more engaged and smiled for the first time in the session. She continued to attend alone and this did not seem to worry her. Over time, E got more and more enthusiastic about the workshop. In her diary she wrote:

*"This workshop seems to pull the group together, and we are working hard, and the same time laughing and enjoying! I start to feel how important it is to learn things together, it allows us to take our time".*

Something clicked within her in the following weeks, and she started to bond with other participants, particularly with U and her daughter. Towards the end of the workshops she wouldn't start the class without greeting them. She also started to stay back late to chat and laugh with the group. On the last day of the workshop, they were organising to meet again soon.

E was one of the most enthusiastic participants. She often cycled back home and attended a lot of other activities, from arts and craft to tai chi and drama. E had good mobility and was seriously committed to learning as many hand gestures and Bharatanatyam movements as she could. She was independent.

This is why I was surprised to notice her confusion when I tried to interview her. She suddenly lost all the confidence and brilliance she had shown over the weeks, and became gloomy again. I was mortified. The last thing I wanted was to ruin a pleasant experience, and decided to cut the questions short. I soon realised that E avoided talking much and instead preferred to focus on gestures and movements. She put in a significant effort and dedication to learn these. E was confident and outgoing; however this was not merely a trait of her personality, but a conscious decision to open herself to new things, and to approach them with enthusiasm and independence. E was brave.

What the workshops provided her with was space and time where she could experiment and be herself without being judged or questioned. She built a relationship with the group based on a common will to keep oneself active, social, alive.

## Camden Carers

2016, 2017

Jesal Patel

Camden Carers offers advice, support and activities for family and unpaid carers across the London Borough of Camden. This service is predominantly aimed at supporting the carers of those living with dementia, however the Dance Well workshops were offered to both the carer and the cared for, again to ensure a shared creative experience. The intention was to provide a creative experience that dissolved the roles, and focused on their underlying relationship, whether that is as spouse, daughter, son, friend etc.



Participants were recruited from the Camden Carers network via their newsletter. Participant numbers fluctuated throughout the weeks, dependent on health conditions and the weather but despite this, most attended the final week to watch a short performance by Jesal which they thoroughly enjoyed.

The opportunity to see a professional dance performance in an intimate setting, especially when they may have very little contact with the arts was important for this group. Through the performance participants were able to relate to the movements they had been learning for the duration of the workshops.



## ***Charing Cross Hospital, Lady Skinner Ward 2018 Georgia Cornwell and Parbati Chaudhury***

These workshops, organised in partnership with Imperial Charity and the head nurse for the ward, were aimed at assisting patients with their preparation to return home. Workshops took place in the day room, so patients were encouraged by staff to leave their beds and participate in the dancing. Patients remained seated throughout the class but were very engaged in learning mudras and in particular articulating the fingers, and wrist joints which could be painful for some.

The use of mudras and soft balls to squeeze between the fingers was of particular interest to ward nurses and was aimed to help patients to carry out day to day tasks upon discharge from the hospital such as picking up a cup or opening a cupboard. Participant numbers fluctuated but were greatly facilitated by the encouragement of nurses, both in bringing them to the day room, and remaining in the room to join in with the movements. There were occasions where staff attempted to move participants' limbs for them to ensure they were performing the movement "correctly" however over the weeks they learned that the main aim of the workshops were simply to encourage any form of movement.

The initial series of workshops was so well received by patients and staff that Imperial Charity were able to fundraise to continue running a further 52 weeks of workshops into 2019. As these workshops have become a regular fixture in the weekly schedule of the ward, patients and staff have further embraced them as means to not only aid patients' rehabilitation but relieve the monotony of the day and encourage patients to interact with each other.

***"[I] feel like my left hand is getting stronger." – Stroke patient***

***"[I] did not realise how much I could move!" – Patient***

***"It is very calming and helps patients to express themselves." – Staff nurse***

***"Patients from my observation, enjoyed the music and the dancing moves. It was heartfelt to see them smiling, laughing and enjoying themselves." – Staff nurse***

## ***Dementia Befriending Service 2017 Archana Ballal***

It is often difficult to reach isolated and therefore physically inactive older adults, as they may not leave their homes and subsequently are not part of any local organisation or community group. These two workshops were trial sessions to take South Asian dance to house-bound older adults living with dementia, working in conjunction with the Dementia Befriending Service at Age UK.

The dance artist was accompanied by a member of staff from the Dementia Befrienders service and visited the older adult at home, engaging them in a short performance/participatory session in their lounge. This included learning a few short movements that could be completed in their chair or within a small space. Feedback from the two participants was very positive.

One of the participants was "initially reluctant to join in as she was unfamiliar with that type of dance, but then once she got dancing she was very happy and joined in enthusiastically. A lot of the visit was spent reminiscing about her experiences of dancing, where she used to dance, for example at weddings and regular dances, and the types of dances, mainly waltzes and rhumba. [She] said she has been dancing since she was ten and that it is a strong part of her identity. [She] was very thankful for the visit and said it helped make her feel young again."

The second participant had recently had a fall and was therefore not feeling 100%, however was keen to learn some movements from a seated position. She was also able to enjoy a short performance by Archana in her lounge. For both participants the dancing sparked an opportunity to reminisce about their own memories of dancing, and the sessions were filled with a lot of smiling and laughter.





## ***Harefield Hospital 2016, 2017, 2018***

***Rachel Waterman and Hiten Mistry***

Akademi's relationship with Harefield Hospital and rb&hArts predates the Dance Well Project and has been one of the most long standing and beneficial relationships of this project. Royal Brompton & Harefield is one of Europe's largest centres for the diagnosis and treatment of heart disease and as such Dance Well aimed to provide workshops for those who have undergone heart operations or are living with long term heart or lung conditions including Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

Harefield hospital was the location of the very first Dance Well taster sessions in 2016 whereupon 47 individuals arrived to experience these new dance workshops. The popularity of the workshops has continued throughout 2017 and 2018 with participants continually requesting ongoing classes. For many of these participants the dance workshops are the only physical activity they partake in, as the gym or exercises classes do not appeal. Ongoing physical activity for this group is particularly important in maintaining their health alongside a chronic health condition. Again, the training for the dance artists to teach this group is imperative with continual awareness of demands on the cardiovascular and respiratory system and monitoring of movements that involve the arms being raised above chest height which puts additional stress on the heart.





Participants at Harefield Hospital appeared in a short BBC news report in 2016 for the BBC Asian network, feature heavily in the Dance Well video and have been fantastic advocates for Akademi's work, speaking at the Aesop Arts and Health Showcase in 2018.

We were delighted in 2018 to receive ethical approval from the Health Research Authority to carry out an investigation in to the impact of South Asian dance classes on physical fitness and mental wellbeing in post-rehab pulmonary and cardiac patients alongside the cardiac physiotherapy team. This research involved measurements of physical fitness and psychological wellbeing before and after participation in 12 weeks of Dance Well workshops, the results of which will be published in 2019.

***“From day 1 of taster session in 2016 I knew I wanted to come every week. Wish it to continue for us.”***

***“The movement has really helped my arthritis. The group cheer me up. Friday is my happiest day due to the workshop.”***



## ***Henna Asian Womens' Group 2016, 2017***

***Marcina Uvarshi Arnold and Archita Kumar***

Henna Asian Women's Group, based at Abbey Community Centre is a membership group offering women only services in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.

The brief for these workshops was to provide Bollywood (2016) dance classes that would help the women with their balance and gait pattern due to a propensity of issues with this amongst the group. There were some challenges with language within this group as their main language was Hindi. Despite this, a small number of the group performed for a small audience on the final week, with translation provided by a member of staff. Although the group enjoyed the workshops there were some frustrations and they also stated that they were keen to learn some more classical dance styles.

Therefore on our return to the group in 2017 the workshops were led by Archita Kumar who was able to lead the workshops in a combination of Hindi and English. This enabled Archita to build a rapport with the women. On this occasion they also chose to learn Kathak as they were keen to focus on the technical aspects of a classical dance form. They very much enjoyed learning these new styles and being able to utilise ghungroos as part of their dancing.

***“The participants felt that they have increased their knowledge around Indian classical dancing. This is a style of dancing that they have never practiced, and it was even more enjoyable whilst using the additional dancing equipment that are used by classical dancers.”***





## **Kentish Town Community Centre 2017**

**Maryam Shakiba**

The workshops at Kentish Town Community Centre were Dance Well's first foray into organising an open workshop at a community centre that anyone could attend rather than working directly with a community organisation. It was hoped that this would be a trial model for future social prescription (exercise on referral).

This model however proved challenging in the recruitment of participants despite wide advertising through community networks and posters within the community centre. A small group of participants did attend the sessions, including some who had previously attended Dance Well workshops at other locations. Over the course of the 8 weeks, 11 people visited the sessions and it was felt that if workshops had continued for longer this number would have increased. For this model to be successful it is imperative that there is a core group to begin working with, from which the work can develop and others can join.



## **Milman Street Community Centre 2017**

**Archita Kumar and Marcina Arnold**

Milman Street Community Centre is one of 3 centres that make up Holborn Community Association. These workshops were run with regular users of the centres as well as drop in attendees and eventually led into an intergenerational project with young people from Bedford House, one of HCA's other centres.

The Bollywood for All project incorporated older adults at Milman Street Resource Centre and young people aged 5 – 14 at Bedford House Community Centre. Participants spent six weeks learning Bollywood movements and creating a short piece of choreography that eventually led to an intergenerational performance. Although only 24 people took part in the final performance due to mobility restrictions or other commitments, 51 people (26 young people and 25 older adults) were able to participate in the dance workshops leading up to the performance. This meant that even those who could not perform were able to learn a new dance skill and interact with each other in a fun and friendly environment.

Those who took part in the final 2 workshops and performances were able to work together with other generations to create the final choreography. Both groups worked extremely well together and learned to interact and dance as one group. The older adults in the group found working with the young people very enjoyable, sharing choreography and helping each other to create a performance that involved everyone, regardless of age. The final performance took place at Senate House as part of the Bloomsbury Festival and received extremely positive feedback from all in the audience. Many participants mentioned that they would like to continue learning Bollywood dance after the workshop as well and to learn about different cultures. **A short video was created of this project which is available to watch via our Youtube channel.**

***"I joined the group for the first time at the age of 65 with a disability. It's motivated me; encouraged me to do something for myself, and I'm very proud."***







## ***Netherwood Dementia Day Centre***

**2016**

***Rachel Waterman***

Netherwood is a specialist day centre for people living with dementia providing a range of activities throughout the day, including music therapy and social activities. Service users are predominantly at moderate to severe stages of dementia. A number of centre staff were present to help facilitate and to look after personal needs of participants. Some participants were reluctant and very vocal in not wanting to participate at the beginning, but joined in if left to their own free will rather than specifically being asked to take part.

We received fantastic feedback from the 1st taster session, with participants gradually gaining in confidence and relaxing through the duration of the session. The use of props helped to engage participants although some care had to be taken when using the giant balloon, as it could cause some nervousness and fear in some if it floated towards them, particularly as they expected it to be heavy.

During week 4 some additional participants from Raglan Day centre visited for the session. These participants were experiencing more advanced dementia and therefore this session was quite challenging. On this occasion there were 25 participants which is a large group for this particular setting unless there are numerous members of staff to assist on a more 1:1 basis or to manage any challenging situations which may arise.

Overall there were noticeable differences in the interactions and levels of engagement with most participants by the final week.

***“Thanks again for yesterday. It really was wonderful!”***

## ***Newham Hospital, Older peoples’ ward (dementia and delirium)***

**2018**

***Archana Ballal and Neesha Radia***

Following on from our work at the Royal London Hospital in 2017, our ward-based activity continued to expand, taking us to Newham Hospital, another hospital within the Barts NHS Foundation Trust. This was again run in partnership with Vital Arts, the arts charity of Barts. On site support and guidance was provided by the Dementia and Delirium nurses on the older peoples’ ward. It was decided that bedside dance activity would be best suited for this particular ward and therefore two dance artists, Archana Ballal and Neesha Radia, worked together within the bays.

Patients on the ward had predominantly been admitted for acute conditions including dementia and delirium and the artists therefore had to be prepared to react to any situation on arrival at the ward. Ward staff often joined in with the dancing, which allowed patients to see a different side to the nurses and build social cohesion, thereby altering the mood across the ward.

***“[The dancing] brought a smile to the patients faces, made them more alert, sleeping less during day.”***

***“[It] enhanced patients’ recovery.”***





## Case study

### Newham Hospital

*Written by Pia Zicchi, Dance Well Project Assistant*

L was a patient on the older peoples ward at Newham Hospital for 8 weeks where we were working alongside the Dementia and Delirium nurses. She was in a bay with 3 other women and during her first week at the hospital we began a series of Dance Well workshops at the bedside. Although the four patients were initially unsure as to why myself, two dance artists and the Dance Well Project Officer were visiting them, we still received a warm welcome. Not too long after the artists began to play some music the women in the bay, including L, were keen to grab some hand bells and scarves and start to move. The patients moved in response to the music and the dance artists encouraged them to be creative and express themselves. The atmosphere had quickly become so lively that soon even the staff nurses were joining in to show off their best dance moves.

The following week we visited the same bay, as the women seemed to enjoy our first session so much, but unfortunately L was unable to participate or even observe the dance workshop this time as the curtain around her bed was drawn. However, over the course of the project at Newham Hospital, myself and the dance artists saw L a number of times. L gradually started to recognise us, and each week we were greeted with a broad smile. It became clear that due to her very painful back L was unable to participate physically for most of the sessions.

During some sessions she would hold one end of a scarf and perform some gentle movements whilst we held the other end and we would encourage her to grip onto the hand bells, but she was very aware of her physical limits and would stop after a short while. Despite this, she was very content simply listening to the music and watching the other patients dance with the artists. Although L could not always join in the physical elements of a session, it became apparent that by us visiting the bay weekly she was becoming more confident with myself and the two dance artists.

As the weeks went on L started to engage in conversation more and more with myself and the dance artists regarding her past, her home life and her current health issues. During one of our conversations, she told me that once she was discharged the hospital wanted to place her in residential care to continue receiving the treatment she needed. The following week, our last Dance Well session at Newham Hospital, I asked L how she was doing, and she told me that she had received the good news that the hospital were letting her go back home. It seemed that by spending time with L every week within a creative, welcoming activity, we were able to build a good rapport with her, which meant that even when she did not want to copy the movement, she still felt part of the session and comfortable enough to confide in us.

Although the sessions are movement based, the benefits reach further than physical embodiment. In the case of L, the physical aspect was only a tiny part of her experience. It seemed that she grew to enjoy speaking to new people and listening to music. In a hospital environment, this can be the biggest part of performing arts interventions.

This case study of L is just one example out of many personal interactions Akademi have across the Dance Well project. By bringing something different onto a ward, such as dance, we were able to make positive connections with patients like L and give them something to focus on other than their health or current situation.







### ***North London Cares 2016 Archita Kumar***

North London Cares is a community network of young professionals and older adults, coming together to take part in activities and thereby reducing loneliness. This was a one-off workshop as part of their weekly gathering to coincide with Diwali. Archita performed a 7 minute Kathak piece, much to the delight of the audience, followed by some participatory activity using tea lights. Some participants moved into the space to improvise with the tea lights whilst others preferred to sit and watch.

The participants then learned a short routine focusing on storytelling. The group was then split in two with one group watching and one group performing.

This workshop was especially enjoyable with the mix of older adults and young professionals both learning the dance routine and having fun together. As the workshop was part of a longer event, it was a very relaxed atmosphere with 41 people joining in with the dancing, across a broad age range.

Through the dancing they were also able to learn a little more about Diwali which they could then discuss further as part of their afternoon of activities.

### ***Our Three Points 2018 Neesha Radia***

Our Three Points works across three community centres in Camden; Kentish Town City Farm, Queens Crescent Community Centre and Castlehaven, with the aim of bringing people together across the three organisations. Dance Well workshops were held predominantly at Queens Crescent Community Centre, with a couple taking place at Kentish Town City Farm.

The participants of this group varied in ability, with some very keen to learn Kathak technique in more detail. Neesha therefore led them in an exploration of their own creativity, as well as some set choreography to create a final piece of movement. This provided a good combination of creativity and also learning specific South Asian dance movements, which they were very keen to perfect.

The group were offered the opportunity to perform this choreography as part of the Hampstead Festival arranged by Heath Hands, however, they declined to perform but were happy to participate in another workshop as part of the festival.

Neesha performed two short solos as part of the festival on Parliament Hill, followed by a short outdoors workshop. Some of the participants from the original workshops came to Hampstead Heath to take part, along with other members of the public attending the festival. This was a wonderful opportunity for participants to demonstrate the skills they had learned over the weeks without the pressure of performing in front of an audience.





## **Royal Brompton Hospital 2018**

### **Archita Kumar and Georgia Cornwell**

The workshops at the Royal Brompton were an extension of our work with Harefield Hospital, but this time expanding into the respiratory wards. We visited the Victoria Ward at the Royal Brompton, Fulham Road, providing workshops within the family room, but also offering bedside 1:1 movement for those that were unable to leave the bay. Due to the range of conditions, breathing was often quite restricted, and Archita was therefore mindful to avoid too many arm movements so as to avoid patients becoming breathless. Some patients welcomed the distraction from treatment and visits from consultants and physiotherapists, whereas others were quite uncertain about the prospect of movement. Many patients informed us that their health was quite poor and they therefore couldn't take part, but after watching some of the movement they would eventually join in. This was particularly evident with one patient who declined to take part, but the following week joined us in the family room to just watch. By the end of the session she participated in the cooldown and gentle stretching.

During our time on the Victoria Ward we also visited the High Dependency Unit. Props had to be carefully selected if they were used in this ward due to infection control, however the use of dandiya was particularly successful here, as well as the welcome distraction of music.

Participation in the Victoria Ward was quite minimal and for the final four weeks we therefore moved to the adult surgical wards at the Royal Brompton. Due to many of these patients having undergone heart surgery quite recently, a list of restricted movements was provided by the Occupational Therapist. These included reaching or twisting movements with the arms and torso. For this reason it was decided to provide a short performance in the bay followed by some participation using mudras, with minimal movement of the arms. This meant that patients could participate and learn about South Asian Dance, but without risk to their health.

## **Royal Free Hospital 2018**

### **Archita Kumar**

In early 2018, the Royal Free Charity opened the Support Hub inside the Royal Free Hospital. The Support Hub is a designated space for people that have been diagnosed with long-term conditions and those that care for them. The charity offers visitors advice and information on a number of topics such as benefits and health and they also run various activities and workshops.

Akademi worked in partnership with the Support Hub to run 8 weekly 1-hour workshops which were held at The Royal Free Recreation Centre next to the hospital. The workshops were advertised through the Support Hub where outpatients of the hospital could sign up to take part in the dance movement sessions. Participants were able to sign up at any point throughout the course of the 8 weeks, meaning that the group would change from week to week.

The participants learnt some of the basics from the South Asian dance style Kathak. This included footwork, hand gestures, bols and rhythm patterns. As the number of group members varied throughout the course of the project, Archita wasn't always able to build on the same repertoire each week. However, towards the end of the 8 weeks there were a small number of people that had attended consecutive sessions, meaning that they were able to learn some Kathak rhythmic patterns and storytelling choreography and increase the difficulty during the following sessions. They seemed to enjoy learning the intricate technique of the style and one attendee described the sessions as "very stimulating mentally and physically". For many of the participants it was a chance to learn new things and maintain their health and wellbeing through physical activity.

One participant enjoyed the workshops so much that she even came to another series of workshops that we were running locally at the time and asked for video footage of the sequences that were taught so she could practice at home.

***"The sessions do not just provide relaxation. They are very educational. We have to use our brains as well. They are very stimulating mentally and physically."***



**Royal London Hospital**  
**2017**  
**Jesal Patel**

This project, co-ordinated in collaboration with Vital Arts, the arts charity of Barts NHS Foundation trust, was Dance Well's first foray into hospital wards. Prior to beginning this series of workshops the team met with the Occupational Therapy team on the older peoples' wards to ensure there was a clear understanding of the needs of the patients and how they might complement the Occupational Therapist's work.

The workshops took place in a small side room within the ward, however unfortunately it was quite a small space so capacity for the workshops was quite low. Coupled with this, patients had to be brought in by wheelchair by either the nurses, occupational therapists or porters. This meant that arriving into the room was quite time consuming with very few participants each week, however engagement with other people on the wards was still appreciated by those who attended.

The participants had a range of health conditions including dementia, recent fractures, heart disease, COPD and other respiratory conditions, or admissions for other acute conditions.

Participants seemed to enjoy the workshops and an opportunity to do something different during their day. They also really enjoyed meeting other people whose room might be down the corridor from them or on the other ward. It meant they had chance to socialise with other patients, especially if they were in an individual room rather than a ward of 6 – 8 people.

On one occasion when no Occupational Therapists were available for the workshops, the dancing was taken to the wards to complete some 1:1 bedside movement. This worked extremely well, engaging people who were bedbound and might otherwise not have had chance to participate. This first bedside session then led to further participatory activity within wards during year 3 of Dance Well.

**An independent observation and report was carried out by Felicity Beach which can be downloaded from our website.**







***St Pancras Community Association  
2016, 2017, 2018***

***Jane Chan, Hetel Gokal and Georgia Cornwell***

Workshops at St Pancras Community Association ran across all three years of Dance Well and were very well received by members. Many of the attendees already participated in a weekly singing workshop which focused on songs from musicals, and the dance artists therefore tried to incorporate that into the dance workshops. This was achieved by choreographing Kathak dance movements to songs they would be familiar with such as “Do Re Mi” from The Sound of Music. This worked extremely well with the group as they were able to sing along to a song they knew whilst also learning new South Asian mudras to accompany it.

There was a small but regular group of participants who stayed with the project across all three years, with others coming and going in between. The community centre felt the workshops were so successful they also sought their own funding to continue once the Dance Well workshops had finished. This also saw Dance Well feature in a short film for Autotrader as part of their local philanthropic work.





**Surma Centre  
2017  
Somita Basak**

The Bengali Workers' Association is a voluntary organisation providing support and activities to the Bangladeshi Community.

These workshops were placed within an existing time slot for physical activity so as to keep their regular schedule and was a women-only class. The women all visit the centre on a regular basis and therefore all know each other and were often in the space chatting prior to our arrival. The majority of the group spoke predominantly in Bengali and Somita was able to converse with them in Bengali but there was also a member of staff present to translate.

They were a fairly active group and therefore enjoyed the more moderate to vigorous activity and being able to put together a series of movements. Somita explored the nine facial expressions, or Navarasa, which led to much hilarity as the women demonstrated different emotions including anger, mischief and sadness.

Completing evaluation forms for this particular set of workshops was especially challenging despite the forms having been translated into Bengali. This was due to the fact that many of the women were illiterate, so even though it was written in Bengali they were not able to complete them. This led to the Dance Well team evaluating how we collect feedback from participants and investigating new methods such as voice recordings.



**Tate Exchange  
2018  
Archita Kumar and Jane Chan**

Through our work with Vital Arts we were invited to be part of Tate Exchange 2018, where Tate Associate organisations (Vital Arts) are given select dates to take over the 5th floor of the Blavatnik Building with activities for the public. As one of a group of organisations working with Vital Arts we provided a weekend of dance workshops and performances. These were performed in collaboration with Music In Hospitals who provided live drumming to accompany the dancers' performances, as well as carrying out their own drumming workshop.

This was an interesting opportunity to collaborate with other arts organisations working in health settings, and to engage the public in our work.







### **Third Age Project 2016 Hetel Gokal**

The Third Age Project is a self-help older peoples' charity with a wide reach across West Euston and Regents Park and connections with other local arts organisations such as the New Diorama Theatre and Diorama Studios.

Unlike other workshops, these were preceded by a short Bollywood performance as part of the Third Age Project's Summer Festival at the New Diorama Theatre. The intention of this performance was to raise awareness and interest in the workshops which would commence a few weeks later.

The group were predominately members of the Third Age Project but the workshops also reached out to non-members who were then welcomed to join TAP if they so wished. This was one of the largest groups in the Dance Well project with 44 people attending across the 6 weeks.

Although only a 6-week project, the participants accomplished a lot, mastering a short Bollywood routine to perform in the final week to friends and family. They learnt the meaning behind the song so they could relate their movements to it and tell the story.

### **Wellesley Road Care Home 2016, 2018**

#### **Archita Kumar, Georgia Cornwell and Maryam Shakiba**

Wellesley Road Care Home, a collaboration between Shaw Healthcare and Camden Council, is a residential care home for older adults and people living with dementia. Workshops took place in the home's activity room, with some additional visits to residents' lounges during the first 2 weeks (2016). This ensured all residents had a chance to be involved in the activity and if they were then interested they could come to the activities room the following weeks.

Participants in this group were of a more advanced stage of dementia and therefore attention span on the activity taking place was varied in each person and also throughout the class. For this reason and to help facilitate 1:1 movement there were three members of Akademi staff present; two artists and the Dance Well Project Assistant.

Activities involving props maintained the residents' attention for longer, in particular the dandiya sticks where most people participated and maintained a good rhythm with Archita and Georgia. It was important to greet each person on entering the room, even though some would not remember staff members from the previous week. Moods could also change very quickly throughout the session so it was important to be adaptable throughout the session. Although challenging, these workshops were rewarding and had a beneficial impact upon residents' day. The activities co-ordinator at the home was therefore delighted to welcome us back again in 2018.

*“Spending time with residents doing an activity enables us to see a different side to residents...we see them in a more rounded way!”*





On returning to the home we met many of the same participants from 2016. Although they were not able to remember us, they quickly warmed to the activity again, with props again providing a welcome stimulus to movement.

*“Today’s session appeared especially enjoyable because of the use of the dandiya sticks! A new instrument so it was a novel experience. The exercises, too, are valued to encourage mobility.”*

Some of the residents were more mobile and able to move around the space, and we were therefore encouraged by the staff to increase the level of activity and free movement in the centre of the circle to accommodate this and challenge them.

Following the success of previous years the staff have encouraged many of the home’s residents to participate. We therefore found sessions to be very busy, with people coming in throughout the hour workshop. Although many of the residents are non-verbal they all engaged in some movement over the course of the 5 weeks.



## Learnings and challenges

There were two main challenges during the course of the Dance Well project; recruiting participants to workshops when there was not a strong partner organisation connection, and collecting evaluation and monitoring information from participants. It is well known that completion of paperwork can be a barrier to participation, particularly amongst older adults where it may also prove physically difficult to complete a paper form. We trialled many different ways of gathering data including the use of props to answer questions, paper forms, observations, verbal feedback and via digital form. Although participants were still a little reticent to complete a form, the digital version, completed via large bright buttons on an iPad was a lot more successful and will be the chosen data collection tool in future.

In order to evaluate sessions we also utilised validated tools such as the Arts Observational Scale (ArtsObs) (Fancourt, 2016), Short Form 36, Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), GAD-7 and PHQ-9. The success of these forms was largely dependent on the group of participants in question. Some were more than happy to complete any paperwork required in order to continue attending the workshops and were keen to help, others saw them as an interference in an otherwise relaxed and enjoyable activity.

A key learning has been to empower the participants to lead the sessions. It is important to focus on what participants are able to do, and not what they can no longer do. They are often much more capable than they even realise themselves! Once confidence has begun to grow, and relationships develop between participants, it is possible for them to offer movements and suggestions for the workshops, sometimes taking the lead from the dance artist. This creates a relaxed, friendly atmosphere where inhibitions are lowered, and opportunities for creativity begin to flow.

## Testimonials

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**Karen Taylor**  
**Arts Manager, rb&hArts**

Rb&hArts has worked with Akademi (Claire, Pia, Giulia, Frances, Rachel and Archita) since 2016 on #DanceWell. They are outstanding partners, easy to collaborate with whilst delivering the highest quality work. I have been very impressed with their ability to work with very vulnerable older adults safely and effectively; offer creative movement at a range of entry levels (so it is inclusive but also progressive in terms of learning/wellbeing), their use of creative props and their dance facilitators who simply inspire others to take part with their enthusiasm for their artform.

We have worked together in a range of settings (community and clinical) to promote wellbeing through creative movement and the Dancewell team bring expertise in engagement, facilitation and evaluation, as well as running high quality dance workshops. They are highly organised/efficient – and, importantly, fun, friendly people to work with. Participants here love them and we always look forward to working with them.

**Vic Roft**  
**Dance Well participant, Harefield Hospital**

When I first decided to join the Dance Well workshops I was very unsure and didn't know what to expect. Well I was pleasantly surprised. I was made to feel very welcome and the staff were amazingly friendly and kind. The dance routine was fun and also quite difficult, as I found my coordination was not as good as I thought.

This was a wonderful new experience for me, but unfortunately due to health reasons I couldn't finish the course. I would recommend Akademi Dance Well to everybody.

**Archana Ballal**  
**Dance Artist**

The projects I have facilitated for Akademi's Dance Well programme include two 12 week long projects. One was a weekly group workshop with Older Adults with dementia and their carers in the community; and another was weekly sessions that took place on the Older Adults ward in Newham Hospital. I have also facilitated one off workshops with older adults in community and residential care settings, utilising the Indian dance form of Bharatanatyam in this work.

Through this work I have witnessed the Dance Well project brighten the lives of so many older adults. For some this has happened over several weeks as they have been able to attend weekly sessions in which they have the opportunity to meet other participants, build relationships through moving and learning together and share memories inspired by the movement, props and music. Some participants who only experience one workshop, may have reconnected with their love of dance and music, a sense of confidence they used to have, or a moment of uninhibited joy through movement and connecting with others.

Through Dance Well, participants have had the opportunity to reconnect with their bodies, to build strength, flexibility and stamina whilst working within the range of their body's capabilities. For some, their experience of being in hospital has been transformed for a short period of time, as dancers have brought a sense of vitality and joy to their bedsides and given them a personalised taste of the intricacies of Indian dance. Music has filled the bay, and bright scarves and props have been used for further exploration of movement. During these bedside or chair-based sessions participants have been able to appreciate that, by working with their changing bodies, they are able to continue moving and retain a sense of staying active- even if that is solely through the hands, arms or toes. The use of Indian dance in these workshops has vast possibilities to explore rhythm, physicality through the whole body from fingertips to toes in the exploration of hand gestures, whole body sequences and footwork, as well as bringing delight through story telling and expressive elements of Indian dance forms.

## Events, Conferences and Publications

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## Conferences and events

### May 2016

Navadisha International Dance Conference: New dynamics in South Asian Dance  
Changing Lives/Inspiring Stories: How dance is enhancing people's lives

### May 2017

Dementia Bazaar: Camden Dementia Action Alliance

### June 2017

Creative Dementia Conference

### April 2018

Aesop Arts in Health Conference and Showcase  
Physical Challenges for Older people

### May 2018

Tate Exchange weekend with Vital Arts

### June 2018

London Creativity and Wellbeing Week  
Dance Together: Best practice in dance, health and aging

### November 2018

Engage Conference  
A Social Prescription: Collaborations through arts, health and education

## Publications

### July 2017

Animated - Dance Well: autonomy in movement

### August 2017

Dance Well Resource Book: Teaching South Asian Dance with older adults

### September 2017

Age UK - Promising approaches to living well with dementia

### April 2018

The Stage - Can the healing power of the arts be harnessed by the NHS?

### May 2018

US Department of Arts and Culture - Art & wellbeing: Toward a culture of health

### June 2018

Dance Well education videos

### August 2018

Dance Well participant resource book

### September 2018

Baring Foundation treasury

### October 2018

Arts Professional - Case study of Dance Well



## ***Dance Well Artists***

This project would not be possible without the commitment, dedication and hard work of our team of Dance Well artists. It is their creativity and passion for their art form that imbues each project with such quality and personalisation.



***Archana Ballal***



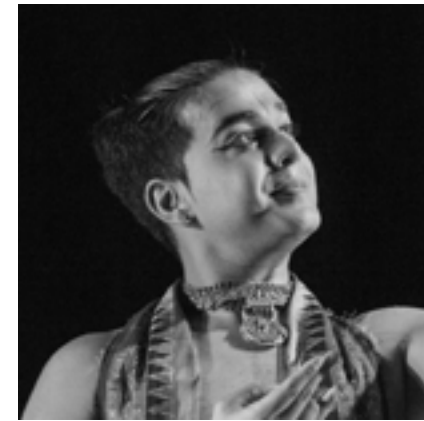
***Archita Kumar***



***Georgia Cornwell***



***Hetal Gokal***



***Hiten Mistry***



***Jane Chan***



***Jesal Patel***



***Marcina Arnold***



***Maryam Shakiba***



***Neesha Radia***



## ***Dance Well Team***



***Parbati Chaudhury***



***Rachel Waterman***



***Claire Farmer***  
***Dance Well Project Officer***  
***(2016 - )***



***Pia Zicchi***  
***Dance Well Project Assistant***  
***(2017 - )***



***Somita Basak***



***Giulia Ghinelli***  
***Dance Well Project Assistant***  
***(2016 - 2017)***



***Frances Moulton***  
***Dance Well Project Assistant***  
***(2016)***

## Legacy

Funding from the Big Lottery over the past 3 years has allowed us the privileged position of being able to offer free dance and movement workshops to those who do not have access arts and cultural activities due to lack of knowledge of this sector or lack of funding. Being able to experience the arts without these restrictions has allowed dance to become an integral part of many community groups and hospitals. Following on from an initial series of workshops, organisations have been compelled to source further funding to continue these sessions.

This has resulted in the following workshops running in 2019:

**- Lady Skinner Ward (Charing Cross Hospital) funded by Imperial Charity**

**- Uxbridge workshops funded by London Catalyst and participant fees of £3**

Akademi has also empowered South Asian dance artists to learn new skills in how to apply their dance practice in different settings. This has been enabled through the provision of free educational resources including a resource book and 24 educational videos available via Akademi's website.

Over the past 3 years, Akademi has delivered numerous training days focused on developing the skills of professional dance artists to deliver workshops in schools, community organisations and hospitals. We have now consolidated this into two training packages that focus on developing and enhancing skills required to lead South Asian dance outreach work.

A one-day training package will include practical sessions designed to demonstrate the best practices when working with older adults and young children with SEN, as well as theory sessions discussing the basics of lesson planning and key things to consider when delivering workshops.

A two-day training package will provide more in-depth practical sessions and detailed information regarding working with older adults living with chronic health conditions in care settings and hospital environments, and children with complex needs in schools and in the community. In addition, there will also be the opportunity to observe Dance Well workshops, allowing for a deeper insight into how Akademi run their outreach programmes and to learn from shadowing experienced artists.

Due to our advocacy work through conferences, publications and word of mouth, throughout the last three years numerous opportunities to work with other organisations have arisen. Akademi are now part of the Camden Dementia Action Alliance and have also participated in Bloomsbury Festival through our Bollywood for all intergenerational project. Our hospital performance programme has also expanded to now include participatory work across more hospitals including the older peoples' wards and paediatric wards at West Middlesex Hospital.

This work is an integral part of Akademi's portfolio, providing additional professional development opportunities for artists performing in our productions, and those partaking in our artist development programmes.

We hope that Akademi's accomplishments and continued progress in dance learning and participation will help to embed South Asian dance into the tapestry of the British healthcare system and community activities, allowing more older adults to come into contact with the arts and culture.





# Funders

This project would not have been possible without funding from the National Lottery through the Big Lottery fund.



# Partners

A huge thank you to all of our partners for their collaborative working and in some instances providing match funding to extend the length of our workshops.



# Akademi staff

Mira Kaushik OBE	Director
Helen Jeffreys	Interim Administrative Director
Hannah Titterton	PA & Administration Assistant
Christina Christou	Consultant Education Director
Claire Farmer	Dance Well Project Officer
Pia Zicchi	Dance Well Project Assistant
Joe West	Learning and Participation Officer
Antrareepa Thakur	Head of Marketing and Sales
Rohanne Udall	Marketing Officer
Syd Rae	Finance Officer
Catherine Ibbotson	Finance Assistant

## With thanks to previous Akademi Staff:

Tim Foxon	Administration Director
Amelia Hart	Education and Community Officer
Frances Moulton	Dance Well Project Assistant
Giulia Ghinelli	Dance Well Project Assistant
Nina Head	Artist Development and Productions
Jaykishen Patel	PA & Marketing Assistant
Renu Mehto	Administration and Finance Assistant
Rob Lynden	Interim General Manager

# Photo credits

Photos throughout this report have been kindly provided by the following photographers:

**Gigi Gianella** (Page 49) - Jane Chan headshot

**Jon Holloway** (Page 9, 10 & 50) Arts4dementia and Rachel Waterman headshot

**Nisha Somasundaram** (Page 49) - Maryam Shakiba headshot

**Rafael Bastos** (Page 49) - Neesha Radia headshot

**Simon Richardson** (Page 48 - 50) - Archita Kumar, Jesal Patel, Parbati Chaudhury and Somita Basak headshots

**Stuart Keegan** (Page 21) Bollywood for All

**Tas Kyprianou** (Page 45) Aesop

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