

November 2015



## Dance for Parkinson's

### Harnessing the power of dance to improve health and wellbeing

[English National Ballet](#) (ENB) is a leading ballet company with an international reputation for artistic excellence. To dance with ENB might seem like a dream beyond the reach of most aspiring dance students, let alone the rest of us. However, the company has developed an exciting engagement programme to share the benefits of dance and music with wider communities, improving health and social outcomes without diluting its commitment to high artistic standards.

A key aspect of ENB's engagement work is [Dance for Parkinson's](#), a dance and cultural programme that supports people with [Parkinson's](#). Parkinson's is a degenerative neurological condition that affects one person in every 500, or about 127,000 people in the UK. It has no known cure and can have a profound impact on people's physical and psychological health and quality of life. ENB uses dance to help people manage their symptoms, rebuild their confidence, and provide opportunities for personal expression, social interaction and peer support that they might otherwise lack.

Public service commissioners have recognised the potential of *Dance for Parkinson's* from the start. [Westminster City Council](#) funded the original West London pilot, charitable funders such as [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#) came on board soon afterwards, and in 2015 ENB secured a one-year contract with the [NHS West London Clinical Commissioning Group](#) (CCG).

#### What does *Dance for Parkinson's* involve?

ENB was inspired to launch *Dance for Parkinson's* after witnessing the work of the [Mark Morris Dance Group](#), an American contemporary dance company that runs a [successful dance programme](#) for people with Parkinson's in New York. It set about developing its own version of the programme to fit the UK context and draw on its core strengths as a classical ballet company. This includes:



**Dance sessions:** Each year, *Dance for Parkinson's* runs three terms of [dance sessions](#) for people with Parkinson's and their carers, plus taster sessions for new participants. Carefully selected dance artists and musicians from ENB lead the sessions, supported by a team of trained volunteers from higher education and the dance or health sectors.

**Cultural and social activities:** Having Parkinson's can be an isolating experience. So, in addition to the socialising time built into dance sessions, ENB offers participants the opportunity to attend two to three ballet performances per year, and take part in four special events, which might include meeting the artists, seeing behind the scenes or watching a rehearsal—activities that have proved very popular.

ENB does not compromise on the quality of the artistic experience it offers through *Dance for Parkinson's*, and it believes that this is an integral aspect of the programme's impact. The London sessions take place in ENB's studio in Kensington, draw on the ballet's current repertoire, and use live music. This has practical benefits. For example, musicians can adapt the tempo to meet participants' needs, and professional dancers can pop into the class after their rehearsals to say hello, join in and demonstrate sections of the repertory that the class is working on.

Fleur Derbyshire-Fox, ENB's Engagement Director, stresses the importance of the dance environment and professional nature of the ballet class. As one participant put it, *"I don't feel dumbed down. I want to know ballet etiquette, it feels respectful to us."*

Others have described how stimulating it is to learn about new ballets, and how dancing helps them to feel empowered and become immersed in something beyond their condition. One participant noted the sense of freedom she feels when dancing, and how it *"helps me regain a sense of control, taking back a choice to do something about it [Parkinson's] rather than simply tolerating it and letting it happen."* Another commented, *"I tend to shun special Parkinson's events because I do not want to be defined by my illness... Getting together to dance, however, can be helpful, because it involves imaginative expression, and so enables me to transcend/forget my Parkinson's."*

### What brought public service commissioners on board?

The commissioner responsible for *Dance for Parkinson's* at NHS West London CCG identifies three factors that persuaded the CCG to fund the programme:

**A gap in services for people with Parkinson's:** The CCG had identified a lack of post-diagnosis support for neurological conditions that typically affect older adults, including Parkinson's. They hoped *Dance for Parkinson's* could help to fill this gap in provision.

**Support for carers:** Every participant in *Dance for Parkinson's* is invited to bring a friend, family member or carer with them, and this appealed to the CCG, which recognises the challenges of caring for someone with Parkinson's.

Fleur notes that the shared experience of dancing puts people on an equal footing and means that, at least temporarily, they no longer feel dependent on their carers.

Carers also value the experience. As one remarked, *"I come to support my sister but I have gotten a great deal out of it myself actually! There are many health benefits to me generally as an older dancer even without Parkinson's; I find myself more confident to join in with other activities and have enjoyed learning about a new art form immensely."*

**The rigorous approach to evaluation:** From the outset, Fleur realised she would need to prove the health and wellbeing benefits of *Dance for Parkinson's*, so she commissioned the [Centre for Dance Research at the University of Roehampton](#) to evaluate the initial pilot in 2010-11 and then undertake a further study of the London and national programmes 2011-14. This was crucial for the CCG, which was keen to support the development of the evidence base for post-diagnosis support, while also testing whether the programme's outcomes might make it a viable longer-term commissioning solution.

### KEY COMMISSIONING FACTS

**Programme:** *Dance for Parkinson's*

**Provider:** English National Ballet (ENB)

**Current commissioner:** NHS West London Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

**Location:** West London

**Duration:** One year (1 February 2015 – 31 January 2016)

**Scope:** The contract is worth £40,391 and forms part of the CCG's Older People's Portfolio.

It funds a class of 45 people with Parkinson's for three terms of 10 sessions, plus two taster sessions for new people from local areas.

The cost of the cultural and social activities is subsidised by ENB.

## EVALUATING DANCE FOR PARKINSON'S

The [Roehampton team](#) researched the experience of *Dance for Parkinson's* participants, evaluating artistic and social engagement and impact on health and quality of life. They used a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures, ranging from biomechanical measurements, clinical ratings scales, movement observations and questionnaires, to interviews, focus groups, participant diaries and film footage. In line with scientific standards, results were also compared with those from a control group of people with Parkinson's who did not dance.

The findings suggested a variety of positive outcomes, such as: helping people with Parkinson's to stay motivated and maintain an active lifestyle (physically and socially); providing a meaningful and stimulating activity in a supportive environment; enabling participants to feel more capable and certain about the future, despite degenerative symptoms; and reducing the interference of symptoms on daily life. For details, see ENB's [blog](#) and [research](#) pages.

### How does the relationship between ENB and the CCG work in practice?

The partnership involved a significant investment of time to begin with, as ENB and the CCG worked together to agree the terms of the contract and define KPIs and reporting formats. Reflecting on this, the CCG feels that ENB's responsive approach and willingness to ensure that outcome measures met their objectives set the relationship off on a strong footing.

The relationship has become lighter touch since then, but the lines of communication are open when challenges arise. For example, the programme has not yet reached its target number of participants, so both organisations are making efforts to increase awareness and referrals (ENB through local support groups, older people's hubs, GPs, Parkinson's nurses and word of mouth, and the CCG through health forums, partner organisations and its GP newsletters).

### What are their messages for other arts providers?

Based on their experience so far, ENB and the CCG outline four main things that arts providers might consider when approaching public service commissioners:

**Show evidence of impact:** The growing focus on outcomes-based commissioning and greater competition for more limited resources make it important to demonstrate impact. *"We're always looking at improving health outcomes and quality of life, but then we're also looking at reducing spend on healthcare services where appropriate,"* the CCG commissioner says. So, will a project keep participants well for longer, improve self-care and reduce dependence on the NHS, thus indicating potential cost savings? While it can be difficult to access data about other health services, some CCGs may be able to facilitate this. Providers can also ask their service users to self-report, enquiring whether they feel better able to manage their condition at home, and whether their use of GP, outpatient or A&E services has changed. Fleur notes that it is worth checking the existing evidence base for corroborating data as well. For instance, when seeking initial funding, ENB referenced US studies that pointed towards the positive impact of dance on Parkinson's.

**Demonstrate sustainability:** In difficult financial times, sustainability is a vital consideration. For example, will a provider train others to roll out its approach in different settings or localities, or develop the capacity for peer support in the community?

**Be proactive about approaching commissioners:** *"Find out what the CCG's priorities are,"* the commissioner recommends. Local [Health and Wellbeing Boards](#) can help the voluntary sector learn what is happening locally, and CCGs publish their commissioning intentions each year. Arts providers might contact commissioners directly if there are unmet needs they could help to address. Indeed, ENB's relationship with the CCG evolved out of a chance conversation between representatives of the two organisations at a Dance for Older People event. Fleur also recommends inviting commissioners to experience a programme directly, so they can meet participants and see the impact for themselves.

**Learn the language of commissioning:** Commissioning terminology can seem daunting to arts providers who are new to the process. *“The challenge is being able to articulate what you’re doing in the right language and not being put off by what you’re being asked. Read as much as possible and don’t be afraid of going back and asking ‘what does it really mean?’”* Fleur advises. With *Dance for Parkinson’s*, she knew the CCG was primarily interested in health and quality of life outcomes, so she researched the [applicable national standards from NICE](#) and thought about how to focus the application accordingly.



### What are their messages for other commissioners?

ENB and the CCG also highlight issues that public service commissioners might bear in mind:

**Be open and responsive:** The process and language of commissioning may be quite new to many arts providers. By being open and responsive, commissioners can help them feel like it is ok to pick up the phone and ask questions. This will help them prepare good quality applications that address commissioning criteria, and the CCG suggests that commissioners can also learn more about local needs from arts providers who are close to local communities and focus on specialist issues.

**Allow flexibility where appropriate:** Commissioning processes can be onerous for small arts providers with limited capacity. While commissioners have to work within standard procedures, a certain amount of flexibility in the contract negotiation and monitoring processes can be helpful.

**Consider supporting efforts to build the evidence base:** The CCG notes that arts providers may be doing great work to improve health outcomes, but they often lack the evidence to prove this. There is, therefore, a case for supporting projects that build the evidence base and deepen our understanding of what works with particular health conditions.

### Next steps: a scalable approach

*Dance for Parkinson’s* has become an integral part of ENB’s work, and there are opportunities to share its benefits more widely. ENB has already developed a *Dance for Parkinson’s* [professional development course](#) to train other dancers, musicians and health professionals, providing a model for dance classes and cultural engagement across the country. Since 2012, and with the support of [Paul Hamlyn Foundation](#), it has also been working with regional organisations to establish strategic [“Hub” partnerships](#) that support people with Parkinson’s beyond London. ENB currently has four Hub Partners, in Oxford ([Oxford City Council](#)), Liverpool ([Merseyside Dance Initiative](#)), Ipswich ([DanceEast](#)) and Cardiff ([National Dance Company Wales](#)). As it looks to the future, finding sustainable funding will be a key priority, and ENB hopes to use what it has learnt from its experience in London to engage public service commissioners in other parts of the UK as well.

*Case study by Clare Harland*

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### USEFUL WEBSITES

- English National Ballet *Dance for Parkinson's* programme: <http://www.ballet.org.uk/learning/dance-parkinsons/>
- *Dance for Parkinson's* Roehampton research website: <http://roehamptondance.com/parkinsons/>
- Dance for Parkinson's Network UK: <http://www.danceforparkinsonsuk.org>

### SELECTED REPORTS & VIDEOS

- 'Ballet: the unlikely respite from Parkinson's', *Channel 4 News*, 27 October 2015: <https://www.facebook.com/Channel4News/videos/10153301238136939/?fref=nf>
- English National Ballet, *Dance for Parkinson's* video for World Ballet Day, 1 October 2015: <https://youtu.be/0UqtB6QU4AY>
- Dr Sara Houston, 'Measuring the impact of dance', *Arts Professional*, 26 May 2015: <http://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/284/article/measuring-impact-dance>
- Judith Potts, 'English National Ballet provides Dance for Parkinson's classes, but more are needed', *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 March 2014: <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/judithpotts/100262756/english-national-ballet-provides-dance-for-parkinsons-classes-but-more-are-needed/>
- Dr Sara Houston & Ashley McGill, 'A mixed-methods study into ballet for people living with Parkinson's', *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, Vol. 5, Issue 2, 2013: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17533015.2012.745580#.VebFmkuV-SK>
- Lorna Stewart, 'En pointe to tackle Parkinson's disease', *BBC World Service*, 13 March 2013 (includes video): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-21682196>
- 'The Balletboyz', *Channel 4 Random Acts*, February 2013. A short film for Channel 4, featuring dancers from the *Dance for Parkinson's* London classes: <http://www.balletboyz.com/videos/dance-for-parkinsons/> and [http://randomacts.channel4.com/#/random\\_acts/one/495](http://randomacts.channel4.com/#/random_acts/one/495)
- 'Inside Out', *BBC London*, 16 January 2012: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTvsYweRZCA> (*Dance for Parkinson's* segment starts at 9:55)

### CULTURAL COMMISSIONING

For information and resources on Cultural Commissioning, visit: <http://www.ncvo.org/CCProg>



ENB, *Dance for Parkinson's* Ipswich, photograph by Rachel Cherry (2015)