



Getting a voice through dance: a pilot participatory dance programme between arts and health, 2012

Evaluation summary

Getting a voice through dance: a pilot participatory dance programme between arts and health

People with complex learning disabilities, including autism, and also dementia, benefitted from a tailored dance programme at a day service at Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. An evaluation undertaken of the pilot project undertaken in 2012, observed 20 individuals participating in two different sessions:

- The Monday group
 - Older people with an average participant age of 66 years, most with dementia.
- The Tuesday Group
 - In-patients in an Assessment and Treatment Service, and day service adults, with an average participant age of 38 years, many with autism.

Results

This pilot project summarised that for the 20 people taking part:

- 67% attending demonstrated improvement in confidence (as observed by staff and through independent mapping observation and interview).
- 73% showed improvement in self-esteem in general with 67% showing improvements in the group setting.
- 53% showed improvements in non-verbal communication skills in general and 67% showed improvements when working as a group.

People were also observed to be participating very actively for over two thirds of the time in the sessions, which is very high considering the nature of their disabilities and low levels of participation in other structured activities. The results indicated improvements in other activities outside the sessions in people's daily living at home and outside the home. For some the Magpie Dance sessions also increased their participation in a healthy activity significantly (with some taking part in no physical activity beforehand).

Arts in health settings

Wellbeing has been identified as “one of the most important aspects of our lives, as individuals and as societies” (The New Economics Foundation's Centre for Wellbeing, 2011). There is a growing body of evidence of the social impact of arts projects on wellbeing, including the Big Lottery Fund's '*National Wellbeing Evaluation*' (2011).

Magpie Dance, a registered charity, supports people with learning disabilities to take an active part in community life through dance. It runs regular year-round community

programmes including youth and adult dance classes, a peer mentoring programme and an in-house training scheme for practitioners (open to people with learning disabilities).

Magpie Dance has been a provider of dance for people with learning disabilities in South East London for nearly 30 years. For the past five years its classes have been supported, in a large part, by the Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities grant programme.

Methodology used

People with learning disabilities face significant health barriers. Often with limited verbal communication skills, their ability to convey health needs effectively may be reduced whilst their support networks may not have adequate training (Bradshaw, 2001). It is also well documented that they have inadequate levels of exercise, with over 80% of adults with LD engaging in levels of physical activity below the Department of Health's minimum level.

Approaches have been identified which may help overcome these barriers. One of the successful approaches known to improve communication and participation in people with learning disabilities with the greatest needs is called *Intensive Interaction*. This is a practical approach to interacting with people with learning disabilities who do not find it easy communicating or being social.

The approach helps the person with learning difficulties and their support worker to relate better to each other. It has been shown to help them develop their communication abilities. In *Intensive Interaction* the support worker works on being an effective communication partner and so supports the person with learning disabilities to develop confidence and competence as a communicator, and achieve this through a fun process. It was felt that the proposed dance programme combined the creativity and expressiveness of 'an arts based approach' with aspects of intensive interaction methods i.e. the building of a supportive and creative communication environment.

In May 2012, a collaborative pilot programme was launched by the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and Magpie Dance. The evaluation of the dance sessions was undertaken by the psychology service within the Learning Disability Sub directorate of Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust.

Observations were made over a series of nine, 1.5 hour sessions. These sessions were facilitated by a live musician, support staff and two Magpie Dance practitioners with extensive experience in dance delivery for people with learning disabilities.

This programme observed 20 individuals and the impact Magpie Dance sessions had on them. These individuals were categorised into three different client groups with learning disabilities, namely:

- Monday Group

- Older people (most of whom have dementia) attending a specialist day service.
- Tuesday Group
 - In-patients in an Assessment and Treatment Service with mental health problems and/or challenging behaviour, many detained under the Mental Health Act.
 - Adults with severe challenging behaviour, most also with autism, attending a specialist challenging behaviour day service.



Monday Group



Tuesday Group

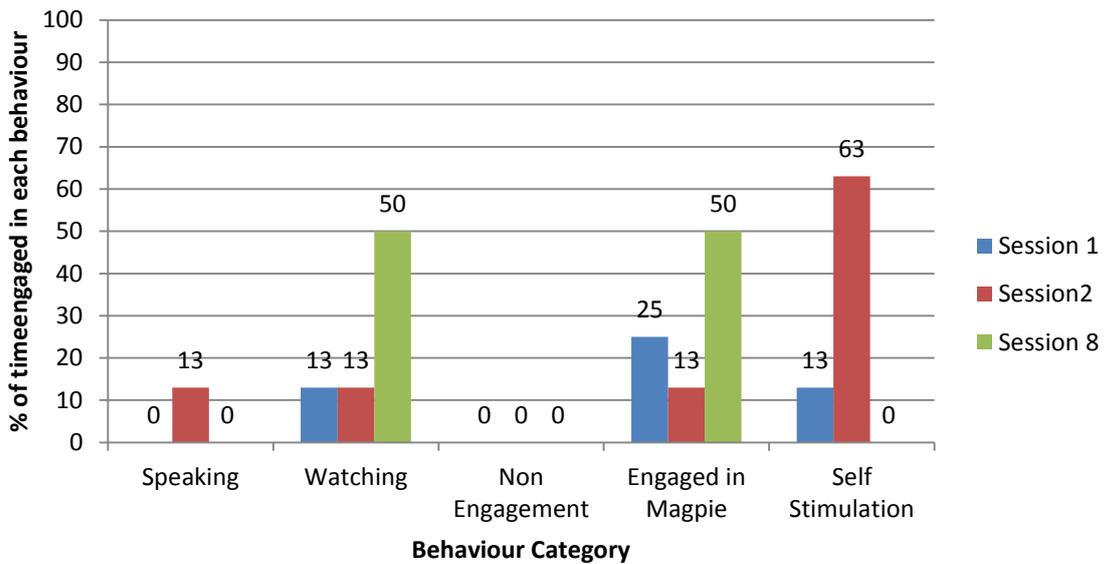
Many of the individuals who participated in this study had little/no expressive language so a variety of methods were used to collect data on the effects of dance in the participant's lives. Methods such as staff questionnaires, standardised measures, participant interviews and direct observation were the main methods used. One particular observation method, Dementia Care Mapping referred to as Care Mapping, was adapted specifically for this programme.

Care Mapping is an observational tool and a service development process used to help care givers contemplate and improve the quality of care for people with dementia. When recording observations or creating a 'map', Care Mappers observe between one and eight people with dementia and attempt to capture the experience of care from the perspective of the person with dementia.

Case study

Throughout this programme, the majority of participants have displayed improvements in many areas of their lives. The most commonly observed improvements were noted in three areas; personal development, wellbeing and participation. See below:

Behaviour and Well Being Charted over 3 sessions for UN



UN does not usually participate in any activity apart from day trips out of the centre. He is known to be very challenging throughout the day, spending the majority of the time banging doors, flicking light switches and wandering the corridor. In session 1 UN watched from the side for the 1st part of the session and with careful interaction from the facilitators slowly started to join the main group flitting in/out for the duration. UN appears to be a very unhappy man but throughout this session he was smiling a lot and actually laughing out loud. The member of staff carrying out the observations reported “I have not seen UN smile for years and have never heard him laugh. It was a joy to watch”.

Conclusion

The full evaluation is available from the Magpie Dance website. A new 3 year programme takes place from 2013 to 2016 for the group with autism at Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, supported partly by the Big Lottery Fund. Further funding and evaluation is being sought to continue the older people with dementia and learning disabilities programme.