

Creative Contemporary Dance for Older Adults: A new Social Prescription Pathway?



Funded by the University of Northampton's Support for Innovation & Research Ideas, Policy & Participation

Principal Investigator:
Dr Melinda Spencer

Research Assistant:
Eadie Simons

2023

Faculty of Arts, Science and Technology
(FAST)
The University of Northampton
Waterside Campus
University Drive
Northampton
NN1 5PH

(01604) 892937
Melinda.spencer2@northampton.ac.uk

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| <i>“I feel that this [Dance Elders] is one of Northampton’s best kept secrets! The group is really good, it should be duplicated all over the country...” (Dance Elder, Performance Company).....</i> | <i>5</i> |
| Executive Summary | 6 |
| Research Questions..... | 7 |
| Methods | 7 |
| Key Findings | 7 |
| What are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults?..... | 7 |
| How does a new social prescription route to a creative and community dance group for older adults work in practice? | 7 |
| How can organisations establish and integrate their services into the social prescription system? | 8 |
| Conclusion | 8 |
| Recommendations | 8 |
| Introduction and aims..... | 9 |
| Background | 9 |
| Social Prescribing | 9 |
| Dance and Older adults | 10 |
| Contemporary dance..... | 11 |
| Research aims..... | 12 |
| Methods..... | 12 |
| Data collection..... | 12 |
| Researcher observations | 12 |
| Weekly collage (image elicitation)..... | 13 |
| Interviews with new dancers | 13 |
| End of term questionnaires | 13 |
| Post-performance and post exchange event questionnaires..... | 13 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Interviews with Dance Facilitators..... | 14 |
| Interviews with Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs) | 14 |
| Dancer demographics and recruitment..... | 14 |
| Data Analysis | 14 |
| Table 1 - Dancer Demographics | 15 |
| Research Findings..... | 16 |
| What are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults?..... | 16 |
| Mind and Body..... | 16 |
| Social Connectedness | 17 |
| Inspiration and confidence | 18 |
| Inclusive and Accessible..... | 20 |
| Investment in group..... | 20 |
| External negatives..... | 21 |
| How does a new social prescription route to a creative and community dance group for older adults work in practice? | 22 |
| Disappointment | 22 |
| Communication..... | 23 |
| How can organisations establish and integrate their services into the social prescription system? | 23 |
| Promotion of activities..... | 24 |
| Matchmaking process..... | 25 |
| Motivation of individuals | 25 |
| Recommendations..... | 26 |
| References..... | 28 |
| APPENDIX A | 32 |
| Table 1 – Coding of telephone interviews and end of term questionnaires..... | 32 |
| APPENDIX B..... | 44 |
| Weekly Collages | 44 |
| Figure 1 – Open Class (end of term 1)..... | 44 |
| Figure 2 – Open Class (end of term 2)..... | 44 |
| Figure 3 – Performance Company (end of term 1) | 45 |

Figure 4 – Performance Company (end of term 2) 45

APPENDIX C..... 46

Table 3 – Coding for facilitator and SPLW interviews 46

Dance Elders Performance Company in rehearsals (2023)



“I feel that this [Dance Elders] is one of Northampton’s best kept secrets! The group is really good, it should be duplicated all over the country...” (Dance Elder, Performance Company)

Executive Summary

Following the introduction and development of the Elders' Dance Company (established by Dancemind in January 2020), Dancemind are delivering a 1 year (2023), 2 stranded programme of contemporary creative dance for people over the age of 60 years in Northamptonshire. Named 'Dance Elders', it aims to offer older people living in the local community opportunities to be more creative by supporting them to design, develop and increase participation in high-quality creative dance activities. This creative pursuit supports physical, cognitive, and social benefits through dancing, with existing research suggesting that dancing improves physical and cognitive ability (Connolly & Redding, 2010; Cruz-Ferreira, Marmeleira, Formigo, Gomes & Fernandes, 2015) and social connections. For example, in the findings from previous evaluations of the Elders' Dance Programme (Spencer, 2020, 2021), contemporary dance routines were reported to challenge the dancers more than other genres of dance physically and cognitively. However, whilst it was challenging, dancers implied that this was a positive aspect of the programme. Participating dancers in the Elders' Dance programme also enjoyed the creative process which included choreography of parts of the routine. As the group progressed, the sense of belonging and friendships formed was an important and valued part of the programme.

Both groups of the Dance Elders programme have been and continue to be delivered over 3 blocks of 11 weeks in 2023. The programme offers opportunity to build and strengthen social ties, connecting with like-minded people, creatively sharing experiences, and building bonds through dance: Group 1. The Open Class - a social prescribing or self-referral route into dance and Group 2. The Performance Company - developing a performance company with a Midlands network of Elders' companies (also available for social prescription and self-referrals). Dancemind will be working in partnership with the Royal & Derngate, Age UK, Spring Northamptonshire Social Prescribing and Warwick Arts Centre. The University of Northampton have been allocated a £3K budget (through ACE funding awarded to Dancemind) to conduct a broad and basic evaluation of the year long programme. Further funding from the University of Northampton from Support for Innovation & Research Ideas, Policy & Participation was awarded in January 2023 to allow a detailed research focus on the social prescribing and self-referral pathways during blocks 1 and 2, and was aimed at: 1) measuring participants' experiences of this new social prescribing and self-referral pathway; 2) exploring how this new social prescription pathway works in practice to inform future integration of accessible services. This report presents findings from terms 1 and 2 of the Dance Elders programme.

Research Questions

Three research questions have been addressed using a mixture of qualitative approaches:

- 1) What are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults?
- 2) How does a new social prescription route to a creative and community dance group for older adults work in practice?
- 3) How can organisations establish and integrate their services into the social prescription system?

Methods

To address the three research questions, various qualitative methods were applied:

- Researcher observations
- Image elicitation (weekly collage)
- Interviews with new dancers
- End of term questionnaires
- Post performance and post exchange event questionnaires
- Interviews with dance facilitators
- Interviews with social prescribing link workers

Key Findings

What are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults?

Dancers relayed the numerous positive factors they had gained from engaging in the dance group. These included equal impacts on the mind and body, social connectedness with others, inspiration and confidence, developing a strong investment in the group, and the joy of finding an inclusive and accessible group to be a part of. Some dancers noted negative experiences related to external factors such as the venue.

How does a new social prescription route to a creative and community dance group for older adults work in practice?

At the end of the first two terms of evaluation, there have been no referrals from social prescribing. The dance facilitators voiced their frustrations and disappointment in the process and the challenges of communication between local organisations and social prescription services.

How can organisations establish and integrate their services into the social prescription system?

It is not a simple and quick process to establish and integrate services into the social prescription system. Social prescription link workers (SPLWs) spoke of the process and associated difficulties faced in relation to the matchmaking process, service-user motivation, and promotion of services.

Conclusion

The Dance Elders creative dance group has been and continues to be a positive experience for those involved. Dancers new and old say they have benefitted greatly from their engagement in the group and are keen for others to have the same experience. However, as a new social prescription pathway it has been unsuccessful to date despite the willingness and determination of the facilitators to make it work. This has been disappointing for all, especially after identifying the numerous positive impacts dancers relayed through this evaluation.

Recommendations

- Firstly, the positive impact that Dance Elders has had on the dancers is abundantly clear and the benefits go far beyond an hour of physical activity. However, the numbers of dancers engaging in the programme has not been as high as anticipated. Therefore, it is recommended that further research into how best to market this programme and the motivations for attending and not attending are explored in further detail.
- Secondly, the communication between social prescription organisations and community groups like Dance Elders requires improvements. Frequent, clear and consistent communication needed between the two was lacking throughout our evaluation. One recommendation is that groups be assigned a designated link worker to keep a direct and open dialogue providing updates on the process and fast response to questions.
- Finally, the process of establishing a new social prescription route within the local systems has been challenging. The difficulties faced by both the facilitators and link workers suggest that a greater evaluation is needed to assess how the social prescribing systems work in practice.

Introduction and aims

Background

Social Prescribing

The NHS (National Health Service) long term plan (2019) sets out a shift in patient care towards a more person-centred approach. To support this change, the NHS Comprehensive Model of Personalised Care (NHS, 2019) was developed with six key components that enable individuals to take control of their own health. The most recent component recognised by this model is social prescribing, with the NHS (2019) aiming to have 1,000 trained social prescribing link workers in post by the end of 2020/21 rising further by 2023/24. According to the King's Fund (2020) there are various models of social prescription being used across the UK, but all share the fundamental concept that referral of patients with social, emotional, or practical needs are made to non-clinical and community resources to support health and wellbeing (Hamilton-West, Milne, and Hotham, 2020). Social prescribing is not a new concept but the recent push in implementation by the NHS (2019) has prompted evaluations of its effectiveness.

It has been suggested that social prescribing has the potential to support older adults' health and wellbeing (Hamilton-West, Milne, and Hotham, 2020). Some notable outcomes include improved self-efficacy, quality of life and reduced loneliness (Foster et al., 2021; Islam, 2020;). Foster et al (2021) evaluated the impact of a national social prescription pathway over a two-year period. They reported similar positive outcomes such as, improved scores for loneliness, wellbeing, confidence, and life having more purpose. It was suggested that having skilled link workers and individualised support for clients was key to the success of the programme. However, these are only the findings from one programme, a systematic review of literature found that evidence is too varied and limited to make conclusions about social prescriptions effectiveness to address loneliness (Reinhardt, Vidovic, & Hammerton, 2021). Another key aim of social prescription pathways is reduced health service use (Kings Fund, 2020). The shift to personalised care is coupled with the aim of providing people the tools and knowledge to manage their own health and wellbeing. Effective social prescription pathways should therefore link clients to appropriate community groups that foster a supportive network for the individual. Despite this aim, there is mixed evidence to support this outcome, with studies reporting reductions ranging from 3% to 68% (Reinhardt et al., 2021). Wakefield et al. (2022) highlight that with different models of delivery and measures, and an absence of theory, varying success rates are inevitable. Whilst others suggest that additional robust qualitative and quantitative research is crucial to fully understand the potential of social prescription (Costa et al. 2021; Islam, 2020).

Identifying areas of best practice enables us to design programmes that foster these outcomes and effectively support the individuals enrolled on them. Calderon-Larranaga et al (2021) conducted a realist review of social prescription literature. They identified four main areas that provide opportunities for good practice to be implemented, 1) individual characteristics – the stakeholders buy-in to social prescribing & knowledge of the patients circumstances and appropriate organisations/services, 2) interpersonal relations - interactions within and across sectors, 3) organisational contingencies – practice culture, relevant training opportunities, and accessible resources, 4) policy structures – bottom-up policy making with suitable monitoring strategies. These findings support Wakefield et al (2022) statement that varying success rates are inevitable, concluding that social prescription is not inevitably advantageous but can be supported with the right resources.

Dance and Older adults

Dancing has been identified as a mode of physical activity that can support healthy ageing in older adults due to the associated physiological and psychological benefits (Gronek et al, 2021). Hui et al. (2009) compared the physiological outcomes of older adults in a control group – no intervention – and those in 12-week dance intervention. They found significant improvements from baseline measures in the intervention group for a number of physiological outcomes including, resting heart rate, endurance – assessed by a six-minute walk-test - dynamic balance and balance – assessed by a timed up and go test - and lower limb endurance – assessed using a repeated sit-and-stand test. Skingley, De’Ath and Napleton (2016) build on these positive outcomes, finding that following a three-month dance and arts programme, older adults showed improvements in posture, shoulder mobility and balance. However, the lack of control group means that causality cannot be inferred. The variety of dance interventions implemented in research makes it difficult to generalise the findings, but review papers help consolidate findings and build a stronger evidence base. Hwang and Braun (2015) conducted a systematic review of the dance intervention literature and found that benefits included significant improvements to muscular strength, balance, and flexibility. A more recent meta-analysis of randomised-controlled trials supports these findings, concluding that dance interventions resulted in significantly improved mobility function and endurance performance compared to control groups (Liu, Shen & Tsai, 2021). However, healthy ageing is not only characterised by physiological outcomes, with psychological outcomes being just as important.

Research into wellbeing in later life by Age UK (2018) reported that the strongest response to the question, what makes life worth living? was the importance of maintaining meaningful engagement with the world around us. A range of factors including social,

creative, and physical pursuits and belonging to a community group were measured and it was found that these types of participation contribute to more than a fifth of wellbeing. Dancing incorporates all of these factors, making it a suitable activity for supporting the wellbeing of older adults. In a mixed-methods evaluation of a 'Dance to Health' intervention, various positive outcomes were reported including, high levels of group identity, improved mood and wellbeing, as well as aforementioned physical outcomes such as improved physical control and coordination (Vella-Burrows et al., 2021). Lima & Viera (2007) investigated the use of ballroom dancing as a form of therapy for older adults in Brazil. Following a year of dance classes participants noted five categories of therapeutic meaning for ballroom dancing: fun, health benefits, elicits good dance memories, cultural connections, and socialisation. The findings of these two different studies are consistent with a systematic review of dance therapy in healthy older adults (Pessoa, Neves & Ferreria, 2019), concluding that there were multiple psycho-emotional and social benefits. Specifically noting improved self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and the formation of long-lasting bonds to support coping with the ageing process.

Contemporary dance

One style of dance that is gaining research attention for its role in healthy ageing is contemporary dance. Contemporary dance is a style of interpretive dance that embraces innovation and improvisation, combining moves and techniques from various dance genres. Studies that examined the impact of contemporary dance interventions have noted an improved sense of belonging/community, positive changes to mental health and cognition, and increased activity and mobility (Coubard et al, 2011; Britten, Addington & Astill, 2017; Southcott & Joseph, 2020; Almqvist, 2021). In an exploration of the lived experiences of older adults' contemporary dance classes, the change in participants self-image was the main finding (Almqvist, 2021), no longer labelling themselves as 'too old' as their bodily experience of ageing challenged their preconceptions. Key themes included the transformation from 'what' to 'who' - participants experienced a shift in the classes from being viewed as an old person to being seen as a human being - and the shift from 'other' to 'equal' - participants felt involved in the creative process and thus equal to the instructors. These shifts in self-image facilitate a sense of belonging in the contemporary dance classes, and in turn improved wellbeing. With a different focus on cognitive function, Coubard et al. (2011) conducted a matched group study investigating the impact of contemporary dance on attentional control of older adults, compared to fall prevention programmes and tai chi. They found that whilst neither programme influenced attention setting and suppressing, contemporary dance improved attention switching with no effect resulting from the other two programmes. Thus, suggesting that contemporary dance improves cognitive flexibility.

Social prescription has the potential to support older adults' health and wellbeing, and identifying suitable activity pathways is key to its success. Research evidence highlights that creative dance activities are uniquely placed to support and enhance quality of life by enabling physical and creative activity, whilst developing a sense of belonging within a group. Therefore, it is proposed that developing a high-quality contemporary dance programme for social prescription could lead to self-development and autonomy to self-care, supporting the healthy ageing of older adults in the community.

Research aims

This research is an evaluation of a new social prescription pathway for older adults (Dance Elders) and is aimed at: 1) measuring participants' experiences of this new social prescribing and self-referral pathway; 2) exploring how this new social prescription pathway works in practice to inform future integration of accessible services. To build on previous literature this evaluation addresses three main research questions,

1. What are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults?
2. How does a new social prescription route to a creative and community dance group for older adults work in practice?
3. How can organisations establish and integrate their services into the social prescription system?

Methods

To address the three research questions, various qualitative methods were applied. For all aspects of data collection participant information sheets were provided and informed consent gained. Ethical approval to conduct this research was gained from the Faculty of Arts, Science and Technology Research Ethics Committee, University of Northampton (30th January 2023).

Data collection

Researcher observations

To help answer the first research question, what are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults? The researchers observed the weekly dance sessions, completing an observation record using a template. This focused on the session activities, perceived mood of the dancers and any changes in wellbeing, as well as the approaches taken by the facilitators to engage and support the dancers.

Weekly collage (image elicitation)

To help answer the first research question, what are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults? dancers who gave informed consent participated in a weekly image elicitation activity. This involved creating an A0 poster for each group with photos of them engaging in the dance classes. Each week the participating dancers provided written comments on post-it notes expressing how they felt at the end of the class, these were then displayed on the posters (Appendix B).

Interviews with new dancers

To help answer the first research question, what are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults? New dancers (not existing dancers from previous Dancemind programmes, but new self-referred and/or social prescription referral dancers) were invited to participate in regular telephone interviews. In total 11 telephone interviews were conducted with four new dancers – one dancer joined in the last two weeks of term 2 so only engaged in one interview. All dancers who participated in the telephone interviews were from the open group. Interviews were semi-structured, following an interview guide but with flexibility for the interviewer to ask further questions as they deemed appropriate. Questions were aimed at capturing the views and experiences of new dancers coming into the group and how the impact of regular attendance had on their wellbeing.

End of term questionnaires

To help answer the research questions, what are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults? dancers from both groups were invited to complete questionnaires at the end of both term 1 (January-April) and term 2 (April-June). The questionnaires were comprised of mainly qualitative questions aimed at capturing the views and experiences of dancers across the eleven-week terms, as well as some basic demographic data. In total fourteen dancers completed the term one questionnaire (open group $n = 7$, performance company $n = 7$), and eight dancers completed the term two questionnaire (open group $n = 2$, performance company $n = 3$, both $n = 2$).

Post-performance and post exchange event questionnaires

To help answer the research question, what are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults? dancers from the performance company were invited to complete questionnaires following their curtain raiser performance and exchange event. The questionnaires were comprised of mainly qualitative questions aimed at capturing the views and experiences of dancers following these unique events. All seven individuals involved in the curtain raiser performance completed the questionnaire, and six of the dancers that attended the exchange event completed that questionnaire.

Interviews with Dance Facilitators

To help answer the research question, how does a new social prescription route to a creative and community dance group for older adults work in practice? The dance facilitators were interviewed twice across the course of the two terms. Interviews were semi-structured, following an interview guide but with flexibility for the interviewer to ask further questions as they deemed appropriate. Questions were aimed at capturing the views and experiences of integrating their programme into the social prescription pathway.

Interviews with Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs)

To help answer the questions, how does a new social prescription route to a creative and community group for older adults work in practice? And how can organisations establish and integrate their services into the social prescription system? Two interviews were conducted with SPLWs collaborating with Dancemind. Interviews were semi-structured, following an interview guide but with flexibility for the interviewer to ask further questions as they deemed appropriate. Questions were focussed on understanding the process involved in integrating programmes into the social prescription pathway and SPLW's views and experiences of this process.

Dancer demographics and recruitment

Dancers were recruited to both the open group and performance company through the Royal and Derngate (local theatre), where the weekly sessions took place. There was the option to self-refer or be referred by a social prescribing link worker/organisation through SPRING (Social Prescribing in Northamptonshire). The criteria to join the Dance Elders group was to be over 60 years old and be able to move independently. Numbers fluctuated over the weeks as new dancers joined the groups throughout the terms. Participation in this research evaluation was voluntary, requiring written informed consent from all dancers who wanted to be involved. Most dancers in the sessions gave their consent to participate, and those that did not were omitted from any data collection. All dancers gave verbal consent for photos to be taken by the dance organisation to be used for marketing purposes. Table 1 shows dancer demographics from respondents of questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the telephone interviews, weekly collages, questionnaires, researcher observations, interviews with dance facilitators and interviews with SPLWs were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the six stages outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021): data familiarization; data coding; initial theme generation; developing and reviewing themes; refining, defining and naming themes; writing up thematic analysis.

Table 1 - Dancer Demographics

(collated from questionnaire data – only includes details from questionnaire respondents and not ALL Dance Elders)

| Age | Sex | How did you first hear about Dance Elders? | Ethnicity | Post code | When did you start with Dance Elders? | Which group do you attend? |
|-----|--------|--|-----------------------------|-----------|--|----------------------------|
| 71 | Female | Chronicle and Echo | White-British | NN7 | September 2022 | Performance Company |
| 78 | Male | Internet | White-British | NN1 | September 2022 | Performance Company |
| 67 | Female | Facebook – Royal & Derngate | White-British | NN7 | January 2020 | Both |
| 69 | Female | Northants Telegraph | White-British | MK43 | January 2020 | Both |
| 63 | Female | My friend | White-British | MK19 | September 2022 | Performance Company |
| 61 | Female | Another member invited me | White-British | MK46 | January 2022 | Both |
| 71 | Female | Royal & Derngate Website | White-British | NN3 | October 2022 | Performance Company |
| 70 | Female | Leaflet | Any other ethnic background | NN5 | January 2022 | Performance Company |
| 69 | Female | Facebook | White-British | NN4 | May 2021 | Open Class |
| 70 | Female | Friend/flyer | White-British | NN7 | January 2023 | Open Class |
| 69 | Female | Museum leaflet | White-British | NN1 | January 2022 | Open Class |
| 78 | Female | On museum website | White-British | NN2 | Cannot remember – 3 rd term | Open Class |
| 65 | Female | Facebook | White-British | NN6 | January 2023 | Open Class |
| 74 | Female | Leaflet in Franklins | White-British | NN7 | January 2023 | Open Class |
| 79 | Female | Royal & Derngate | White-British | NN2 | January 2020? | Performance Company |
| 63 | Female | A friend | White-British | MK15 | Easter 2022 | Performance Company |

Research Findings

The qualitative methods yielded a range of findings that have been organised into higher order themes. Findings are presented in relation to the three research questions, with each theme reported in detail. Table 2 (Appendix A) shows the coding from telephone interviews and questionnaires. Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 (Appendix B) show the final weekly collages for the open group and performance company, respectively.

What are the experiences of being part of a creative and community dance group for older adults?

This research question is addressed through the data we collected from the dancers engaged in the group, our interviews with new dancers, end of term questionnaires, post-performance and post exchange event questionnaires and the weekly collages. Five themes were identified within the data, that are explored below.

Mind and Body

"I think it [Dance Elders] does me good all round, in mind and body" (Participant 3, telephone interviews). The four new dancers who participated in the telephone interviews spoke of the various mental and physical benefits they were noticing after attending the dance classes. They felt that the sessions were exercising more than just their bodies but their minds as well. The 'mind' element of the theme reflects the dancers noting the impact on cognitive processes by working to remember the steps and routines. "It's good for cognitive process, trying to remember things" (Participant 1, telephone interviews) and "I like the mental challenge of learning a routine as well as the dancing" (Respondent 10, End of term 1 questionnaire). This supports the various existing research which evidences some improvements to cognitive function and flexibility as a result of dance (Coubard et al., 2011; Meng et al., 2020) and previous evaluations of the Dancemind programmes (Spencer, 2020, 2021).

In relation to the 'body', all dancers from the telephone interviews spoke of the intensity of the dance being just right for their bodies to manage. This would lead to dancers feeling stretched after the sessions. One dancer also noted that by attending the classes regularly they had seen an improvement in their balance. "Physically I think it helps with my balance a little bit more" (Participant 3, telephone interviews).

Whilst recounting the different mental and physical benefits they had experienced, dancers consistently spoke of them together, in partnership. This theme was also reflected in the responses to the weekly collages and the questionnaires. Dancers noted individual impacts

that ranged from general feelings of physical and mental wellbeing to more specific changes such as improved balance or memory.

The appearance of this theme in all aspects of data collection highlights that the dance classes impact mind and body irrespective of when dancers joined the group. Dancers who have engaged in previous Dancemind programmes would speak of the mental and physical benefits with as much significance as new dancers. A dancer who has been with the group since the inception of the original Elders' Dance, noted about their overall experience of Dance Elders:

"Doing something physical that is enjoyable & helps keep me going (-ish). Developing routines week by week which are satisfying - feel I'm still able to learn new stuff" (Respondent 11, End of term 1 questionnaire).

Social Connectedness

The social aspect of the dance classes held great significance in the dancers' experiences of the group, as highlighted by the following quote. "The comradery, the chat over coffee afterwards is almost as important as the class" (Respondent 13, End of term 1 questionnaire). The new dancers spoke of feeling welcomed into the group from the first session, and later recalled how they were meeting fellow dancers for coffee and cake outside of sessions – which became a regular event. This social interaction within the group helped to create a relaxed environment for the dance to be taught in. "[Dance Elders] The highlight of my week. It's great to feel part of a group of like-minded people who give incredible support" (Respondent 1, Post-performance questionnaire). In the open class particularly, there was a notable change in the group dynamics as participants settled into the group, which was recorded in the researcher's observation notes. "[Dancers] Appear comfortable and relaxed in the group – really different energy within the group compared to previous weeks" (from the Week 6 observations of the open group).

The importance of friendships and social connection was echoed by dancers who had engaged in previous Dancemind programmes as well as those new to Dance Elders. Responses to the weekly collage and end of term questionnaires voiced the enjoyment that emerged from the group setting. When asked in the end of term questionnaires what were the three most important things they had gained from taking part in Dance Elders, 'friends' and 'friendship' and 'social interaction' were included in all responses. "Glad I came. Enjoyed being with friends" (Dancer – Weekly Collage, Performance Company) and notably, reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation, "I Live alone and felt pretty lonely today but I don't now after this class!" (Dancer – Weekly Collage, Performance Company).

Our findings highlight the relatively short-term benefits social interaction and connection had on the dancers but there is research evidence of the longer-term impact it can have. One systematic review of older adults (over 50 years old) and their social interactions found a relationship between social activity and improvements in a range of cognitive processes – global cognition, executive functioning, working memory, visuospatial abilities, and processing speed (Kelly et al., 2017). Maintaining social relationships has also been shown to decrease the risks of morbidity and mortality (Connolly & Redding, 2010; Holt-Lunstad & Smith, 2012; Cruz-Ferreira et al., 2015; Moreno-Tamayo et al., 2022). Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010) conducted a meta-analysis, finding an effect size of OR = 1.50 (95% CI 1.42 to 1.59). This shows that individuals with stronger social relationships have a 50% increased likelihood of extending healthy life expectancy.

Inspiration and confidence

“Obviously we've got our own group which is excellent and has grown and evolved into an open group and performance group. What was particularly good about meeting other groups - in person and via videos - was to know that there are lots of people doing what we're doing and that normalises it. That's exactly how it should be. Older people who want to continue to move and stay flexible shouldn't be unusual” (Respondent 2, Post exchange event questionnaire).

Inspiration was reflected by the dancers' responses in various ways. For some it was creative inspiration and for others the sessions inspired confidence in them and normalised older people to dance. The quote above captures the latter and gives insight into the benefits that dancers gained from participating in the exchange event (an event shared with Warwick Arts Centre and other Elders' dance groups). Furthermore, a new dancer with a long-term condition, stated that attending the dance sessions had evoked strong emotions of relief that they were “back to normal” and could engage in this (and previous) activity that they once enjoyed. “It [Dance Elders] has inspired me to go back to [ballet fitness] as well” (Participant 4, telephone interviews). This individual recalled becoming emotional the evening after their first session as they felt so overwhelmed by their ability to attend the class which ultimately made them feel “normal” and confident to attend further sessions. Similarly, another dancer (previously engaged in the Dancemind programmes) expressed inspiration from the knowledge they gained about themselves such as their ability to “still learn new things” (Respondent 7, End of term 2 questionnaire). Further dancers suggested that this increased confidence was credit to the instructors for creating a positive environment within the sessions. “[The instructors] inspire you to do

better but also that your best is always good enough” (Respondent 3, End of term 2 Questionnaire) and “Tutors brilliant - not judgemental and bring out the best in everyone. Made new friends and subsequently been introduced to other activities. My confidence has increased due to their faith” (Respondent 6, Post-performance Questionnaire).

Being part of the Performance Company also allowed for confidence to increase in ability as well as commitment to perform to the best of one’s abilities. One of the performance company dancers’ records this in their response to the question, please tell us about the impact of performing with the Dance Elders?

“I think it’s (Performance Company) great to work towards a goal, rather than simply exercising. It gives you a focus and encourages you to work harder and to attend as often as possible - we all hate missing rehearsals. It's nice to have the opportunity to show people that we may be a bit old, and a bit fat and we may have health issues, but none of that stops us from having a go and performing to the best of our ability. Every move is assessed and if some people can't quite do it, the move can be changed. Challenging but not intimidating” (Respondent 2, Post-performance Questionnaire).

According to respondent 2 above, the chance to perform gives inspiration and focus to do well and goes beyond simply exercising once a week. There is limited research into the effects of performing dance to audiences on older adults, arguably a topic which requires further exploration. However, research into social dance for older adults by Roberson Jr. and Pelclova (2014) found that social dance can promote a playfulness which links older adults to their younger selves. In this sense, normalising dance performance for older adults and initiating a sense of fun and excitement linked to youthfulness can promote healthy ageing. The extract from respondent 1, end of term 2 questionnaire, shows how the dance sessions have given them the opportunity to pursue their lifelong wish to dance.

I love it [Dance Elders]. I did not have the opportunity to dance as a child. Adult commitments took time and lack of confidence to try dancing. I thought I would never have the chance to dance as my body deteriorates but this has given me something I always wanted to do. It makes me happy (Respondent 1, End of term 2 questionnaire).

Inclusive and Accessible

Participants felt the weekly dance sessions were inclusive and accessible for a range of reasons, with the main reason being the supportive and non-judgemental environment they experienced, as expressed by one of the new dancers, "The joy of being able to do something in a very caring and supportive environment" (Participant 4, telephone interviews). This helped dancers (especially new dancers) feel accepted into the group and appeared to minimise perceived pressure from others to get steps right. Dancers commented on the instructors' empathy and ability to adapt movements to meet the needs of individuals in the group. "[The instructors] make sure everyone can participate, even if they can't do certain movements. There is never any judgement of limitations" (Respondent 13, End of term 1 Questionnaire).

Another new dancer commented multiple times in different interviews about the affordability of the sessions. Suggesting that even as a self-referral and thus not paying the subsidised rate it is priced very competitively. "I think the price is really good. Even if you are paying for it yourself it's not overly expensive" (Participant 1, telephone interviews). This is further echoed by respondent 2, after the exchange event, acknowledging that the Dance Elders is accessible and inclusive.

"The [Exchange] event must have taken a lot of organisation, and I'm grateful to everyone involved. I've organised lots of events in the past and I know how much work is involved for a large-scale event like this to run so smoothly, so thank you for that. I believe that Dance Elders is subsidised and I'm glad that people can get involved who wouldn't be able to pay the full price for weekly sessions and the exchange events. Really important to prevent people being excluded because of low incomes" (Respondent 2, Post Exchange Event Questionnaire).

Investment in group

An interesting theme to arise from the data was how the dancers had invested so much of themselves in the group. New dancers frequently spoke of their concern over the number of individuals participating in the group, eager for the sessions to thrive and continue. "I would like to see some more (dancers) because I want it [Dance Elders] to thrive" (Participant 1, Telephone interviews). Many were actively pushing advertising material to their local groups and friends, knowing the benefits it was having on them and wanting others to share that experience. "I would like to see more recognition of the group, its leaders and the benefits to be had by taking part, within the community" (Respondent 7, End of term 1 questionnaire).

Another strand of investment in the group was the willingness and motivation of dancers to practice routines at home. This was clearly not a session they turned up to once a week and then forgot about until the next session. New dancers frequently spoke of the importance of having the video recordings of their routines so that they could continue to learn and practice at home in preparation for the next session. "I thought, 'We've got the clip so when I get home I'll look at it, break it down slowly and practice myself'" (Participant 1, telephone interviews).

A further dancer commented on the lack of men in the dance groups. At the end of term 2, there were 2 men involved in Dance Elders – one had joined in the last week of term.

"I'm a little sorry that so few men join in with these activities. The groups featured in videos [for the exchange event] had more men as a proportion, but our group and the groups we met had just one or two. Men need this as much as women, - how do we get them involved?" (Respondent 2, Post Exchange Event Questionnaire).

When writing about normative gender roles, Holdsworth (2013) noted that conforming to 'normative notions of masculinity' start from an early age. This social construction of gender and the gendered associations with dance, has a significant influence on boys' involvement in dance. Working against these culturally, socially and historically embedded gendered ideals, is a slow process. However, in more recent British culture, we have seen the film and musical *Billy Elliot* (2000), Diversity winning *Britain's got Talent* (2009) and the successful competitors of various male sporting stars in *Strictly Come Dancing* (Holdsworth, 2013). These challenges to masculinity are becoming more regular and normalised and perhaps, in time, more men will engage in creative dance and be rewarded with the benefits, as suggested by the dancer above.

External negatives

Across all aspects of data collection, dancers rarely made negative comments toward the dance sessions but when they did, they were directed at external factors. The most common comment was made towards the venue, particular the room that classes took place in (specifically in term 1). This was an 'underground' studio in the local theatre, with a low ceiling and no source of natural light. "[The venue] is a bit bleak and this impacted on my mood but does not outweigh other benefits" (Respondent 7, End of term 1 Questionnaire). Dancers felt the room was dingy and sometimes had a smell when you walked in, and dancers who had previously engaged in *Dancemind* programmes felt the

previous venue was much more appealing. Although it should be noted that the previous venue used by Dancemind was no longer available, hence the change to the local theatre.

It's important to highlight how despite these external negative factors having minimal effect on the benefits dancers have gained from the sessions themselves, we cannot dismiss how they have dampened the whole experience. Most dancers commented on these issues at least once throughout our data collection, suggesting they were not trivial.

How does a new social prescription route to a creative and community dance group for older adults work in practice?

Two main themes were identified from our interviews with the dance facilitators that answer this research question, each one is explored in the following text and Table 3 (Appendix C) presents the coding from the dance facilitator's and SPLW's interviews. To the end of term 2, Dancemind had zero referrals from social prescribing despite establishing themselves within the network months prior. As a result, we cannot relay any experiences from a participant's perspective, limiting our understanding of the service-user experience of creative contemporary dance as a social prescription activity for older adults.

Disappointment

The dance facilitators were clearly disappointed with the lack of referrals and their overall experience of the process of setting up their group as a social prescription route. "I feel a bit disillusioned with it really. I feel it's almost a total waste of time for so many people" (Dance facilitator, interview 2). In their first interview they voiced how "challenging" they had found it despite initially "gathering excitement" through conversations with the local social prescription organisations (Age UK and SPRING Northamptonshire). Despite the initial disappointment, the dance facilitators continued to disseminate advertising but to "no avail". Dissemination included social media posts, leaflets and presenting at the Spring Social Prescription Community Marketplace.

In the second interview with the dance facilitators, nearly three months later, the disappointment was still evident. They appeared more frustrated that in those months their experience had not been any more positive despite frequent attempts to engage with social prescribing through various meeting and events. They felt they were lacking information on how to increase referrals as despite some buy-in from Age UK they still had no pay-off. "So even with their enthusiasm there's still a barrier that's stopping people coming forward" (Dance facilitator, interview 2). The facilitators spoke about how they felt

the social prescribing organisations were challenged in developing a system and process where all social prescription activities were given equal opportunity for referrals, suggesting that they may have been lost in a 'sea' of social prescription activities. Thus, creating the sense that it was a waste of time for them and others in the same scenario. These feelings of disappointment set the tone of the other themes arising from the data related to this research question.

Communication

The topic of communication, or lack of, arose in both discussions with the dance facilitators when asked about their experiences. They shared frustrations with the lack of consistent communication from their contacts within the local social prescribing organisations. This impacted on their lack of understanding as to why they had experienced a lack of interest in the programme.

Mid-way through the process of creating a social prescription route, facilitators relayed how the local social prescribing organisation underwent internal restructuring. They note this as a key factor that impacted on the communications they received as they lost contact with individuals that had been instrumental in supporting them through the process. This restructuring also appeared to impact communication within the organisation as facilitators noted that there appeared to be a "lack of cohesion across the town on how [organisation] was rolling out". As a result, any communication they did receive was reported as sporadic and disjointed.

"[the restructuring of the social prescription organisation had a] detrimental impact on keeping lines of communication consistent, and thinking on it, it was this point that things became challenging to move forward." (Dance facilitator, interview 1).

Overall, dance facilitators felt lost in the process and questioned how they could move forward and improve their engagement from referrals. Their experience remained unchanged by the second interview with facilitators quoting social prescription leads openly saying that emails just fall to the bottom of a large pile of similar requests.

How can organisations establish and integrate their services into the social prescription system?

To address this research question, we explored the data from our interviews with the dance facilitators and the SPLWs. Three themes were identified from the data (Table 3, Appendix C presents coding from interview data with facilitators and SPLWs), that are expanded on below.

Promotion of activities

The first step for organisations wishing to establish and integrate their services into social prescription systems is the promotion of their groups/sessions. SPLWs described the various platforms they have for advertising new and existing groups to other SPLW's and the public. One platform used frequently for new groups is the 'community marketplace' where facilitators are given a twenty-minute slot to present what their service is to all the link workers as well as PCN link workers. The Dance Elders facilitators attended one of these sessions and left feeling lost in the system and unsure where to take any further promotion after being told they were waiting to push anything on Facebook until they gained a following.

The dance facilitators discussed their perceived challenges faced by SPLWs and the public in navigating to their programme as they're "just another programme in a big pool of lots of various activities" (Dance facilitator, interview 2). Without the knowledge and feedback from organisations on their promotion strategies it would continue to be difficult to stand out among the array of programmes across the county. Although it was noted by one SPLW that there is a group chat where all link workers across the county can post any new events or promotional material that they come across for others to be aware of.

Both SPLW's spoke of the need for a demonstration of the class to show individuals what the experience is like. "...trying to get that (dance activity) across to people without them actually experiencing what it looks like, it can be difficult and very daunting for people." (SPLW 2, Interview). However, Dance Elders did partake in Headfest - an event to show all community groups in the county that have a positive impact on wellbeing - where no SPLW or their clients were in attendance. This only left the dance facilitators feeling more frustrated as they were unsure what else they could do. This experience was echoed by one of the SPLW's, who relayed instances of poor attendance to similar events and showcasing.

"I know that in headfest where people have the opportunity to go and attend and do it, and I think you know that wasn't as well attended. I feel like we're in a real hard place at the moment because communities want things ...You ask them what they want. You do try and support them and meet them halfway, and they still don't turn up. It's very, very hit and miss and it's very, very hard..." (SPLW 2, Interview).

Matchmaking process

Social Prescribing Link Workers relayed how their main role is to match individuals with the right groups for their interests and abilities. One SPLW discussed the initial process of meeting with a client that involves finding out “what matters to me” to support this matchmaking process. Often this involves collaborating with other organisations to find out what groups and services are available to them.

SPLW’s spoke of the challenges that came with this matchmaking process and how it’s not just about assessing interest in a particular group. One SPLW explained how barriers such as travel links and the individual’s physical ability can affect the suitability of a group. This highlights the importance of the one-to-one supportive conversations with clients. For instance, one SPLW uncovered through these conversations with an interested party that their health conditions and lack of transport links would make it impossible to ensure continued engagement. “...it’s people will only do what they want to do. And it is hard.” (SPLW 2, Interview).

Both SPLW’s stressed that ultimately, they can only do what the individuals want to do, and the lack of referrals is not through lack of trying. Suggesting it’s difficult to encourage clients to try activities that are new to them and until the right people come a long it will be difficult for Dance Elders (and other more specific and creative groups) to establish themselves within the social prescription services. “...it is literally the one person at the right time and boom, it’ll take off” (SPLW 1, Interview).

Motivation of individuals

When discussing the main barriers faced when referring individuals to new groups, SPLW’s spoke of the varying motivation levels of the clients they support. “...trying to get people to commit to something can be quite difficult as well” (SPLW 2, Interview). One SPLW emphasised that their role is not a support worker, as such they try to avoid home visits from the start to “coax” the individual out of the house. They stated that the aim of social prescribing is to empower individuals with the self-motivation needed for continued engagement but if they are not motivated to attend, there is little they can do. One potential reason given for the low levels of motivation was the pandemic, suggesting that the lockdowns had reduced people’s drive to do new things. “...the pandemic has made people more comfortable with not putting themselves out there” (SPLW 2, Interview).

Other potential reasons were discussed, some more generalised such as the weather but others mentioned the mental or physical state of the clients they work with, impacting on

their daily motivations. For instance, they may be motivated to come earlier in the week but when it comes to the day, their conditions takeover and the already low motivation to attend is exacerbated. One SPLW relayed how some clients may have already been engaging with the social prescription systems and have had poor experiences with other groups and thus their motivation to try new things has been knocked. Ultimately, without motivated individuals, even with the right promotion and matchmaking to programmes will prove difficult to regularly engage with clients.

Recommendations

Respondent 1 from the post exchange event questionnaire articulates their experience of Dance Elders most eloquently,

I was a total dance virgin, apart from discos. I need the exercise, I've got gym-phobia, this [Dance Elders] is cheaper too! I get exercise, companionship, and a good use of my time. I thoroughly recommend. I hope it continues. (Respondent 1, Post Exchange Event Questionnaire).

The experiences of dancers, new and old, in the dance group emphasise how beneficial and important creative, community groups are to older adults. The benefits are only amplified by the supporting research from other areas and programmes of dance research. However, the investment that the existing dancers have in Dance Elders does not explain the lower levels of interest experienced so far this year. The lack of growth in the group size suggests more research is needed into the motivations to attend these sessions in the first place and more importantly what puts people off. A review of the marketing of Dance Elders is also important to understand what the best way is to interest older adults in participating.

In relation to the second research question, how does a new social prescription route to a creative and community dance group for older adults work in practice? The dance facilitators were clearly disappointed with the process and the lack of referrals up to the end of term 2. Frequent, clear and consistent communication needed between organisations hosting social prescription activities and social prescribers was not working as well as it could, and changes can be made to improve this. A recommendation suggested by the dance facilitators is that each organisation or group who are interested in offering a social prescription activity (e.g. Dancemind) have a dedicated social prescription link worker to make communication easier and more direct.

Finally, the process of establishing a new social prescription route within the local systems has been challenging. The difficulties faced by both the facilitators and SPLWs suggest that a greater evaluation is needed to assess how the social prescribing systems work in practice. As we were unable to capture the experiences of social prescribed referrals or even potential referrals, it is difficult to comment on the exact reasons why Dancemind was unsuccessful in gathering traction in the system. A further evaluation of the internal processes within these organisations would shed light on the facilitators and barriers to engaging and supporting clients to these groups.

References

- Age UK (2018). Creative and cultural activities and wellbeing in later life. Retrieved from: ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/rb_apr18_creative_and_cultural_activities_wellbeing.pdf [Accessed 22nd August 2023].
- Almqvist, C. F. (2021). Contemporary dance as being and becoming in the age of ageing – Existential aspects of (arts) learning among older amateur dancers. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults*.
- Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3, 77-101.
- Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis A Practical Guide*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Britten, L., Addington, C., and Astill, S. (2017). Dancing in time: Feasibility and acceptability of a contemporary dance programme to modify risk factors for falling in community dwelling older adults. *BMC Geriatrics*. 17(83), 1-12.
- Calderon-Larranaga, S., Milner, Y., Clinch, M., Greenhalgh, T., and Finer, S. (2021). Tensions and opportunities in social prescribing. Developing a framework to facilitate its implementation and evaluation in primary care: a realist review. *BJGP Open*. 5(3), 0017.
- Connolly, M. K., and Redding, E. (2010) Dancing towards well-being in the Third Age. Literature Review on the impact of dance on health and well-being among older people. Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Retrieved from: <https://www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/study/dance/dance-science/dance-science-research/research-in-the-community/dance-health-and-well> [Accessed 17th December 2019].
- Costa, A., Sousa, C. J., Seabra, P. R. C., Virgolino, A., Santos, O., Lopes, J., Henriques, A., Nogueira, P., and Alarcao, V. (2021). Effectiveness of social prescribing programs in the primary health-care context: A systematic literature review. *Sustainability*. 13, 2731.

- Coubard, O. A., Duretz, S., Lefebvre, V., Lapalus, P., and Ferrufino, L. (2011). Practice of contemporary dance improves cognitive flexibility in aging. *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*. 3(13), 1-12.
- Cruz-Ferreira, A., Marmeleria, J., Formigo, A., Gomes, D., and Fernandes, J. (2015). Creative Dance Improves Physical Fitness and Life Satisfaction in Older Women. 37 (8), 837-855.
- Foster, A., Thompson, J., Holding, E., Ariss, S., Mukuria, C., Jacques, R., Akparido, R., and Haywood, A. (2021). Impact of social prescribing to address loneliness: A mixed methods evaluation of a national social prescribing programme. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 29, 1439-1449.
- Gronek, P., Boraczynski, M., Haas, A. N., Adamczyk, J., Pawlaczyk, M., Czarny, W., Clark, C. C. T., Czerniak, U., Demuth, A., Celka, R., Wycichowska, P., Gronek, J., and Kru-Zielinska, M. (2021). Body adaptation to dance: A gerontological perspective. *Aging and Disease*. 12(3), 902-913.
- Hamilton-West, K., Milne, A., and Hotham, S. (2020). New horizons in supporting older people's health and wellbeing: is social prescribing a way forward? *Age and Aging*. 49, 319-326.
- Holdsworth, N. (2013). 'Boys don't do dance, do they?' Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance. 18(2), 168-178.
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. *PLoS Medicine*. 7(7), e1000316.
- Holt-Lunstad, J., and Smith, T. B. (2012). Social Relationships and Mortality. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*. 6(1), 41-53.
- Hui, E., Chui, B. T., and Woo, J. (2009). Effects of dance on physical and psychological well-being in older persons. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*. 49, e45-e50.
- Hwang, P. W. N., & Braun, K. L. (2015). The effectiveness of dance interventions to improve older adults' health: A systematic literature review. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*. 21(5), 64-70.

- Islam M, M. (2020). Social Prescribing—An Effort to Apply a Common Knowledge: Impelling Forces and Challenges. *Frontiers in Public Health*. 8, 515469.
- Kelly, M. E., Duff, H., Kelly, S., Power, J. E. M., Brennan, S., Lawlor, B. A., & Loughrey, D. G. (2017). The impact of social activities, social networks, social support and social relationships on the cognitive functioning of healthy older adults: a systematic review. *Systematic Reviews*. 6(259),1-18.
- Lima, M. M. S., & Viera, A. P. (2007). Ballroom dance as therapy for the elderly in Brazil. *American Journal of Dance Therapy*. 29(2), 129-142.
- Liu, X., Shen, P. L., and Tsai, Y. S. (2021). Dance intervention effects on physical function in healthy older adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Aging Clinical and Experimental Research*. 33, 253-263.
- Meng, X., Li, G., Jia, Y., Liu Y., Shang, B., Liu, p., Bao, X., and Chen, L. (2020). Effects of dance intervention on global cognition, executive function and memory of older adults: a meta-analysis and systematic review. *Aging Clinical and Experimental Research*. 32, 7-19.
- Moreno-Tamayo, K., Juarez, F., Manrique-Espinoza, B., and Mejia-Pailles, G. (2022). The Relationship Between Social Isolation and Mortality Among Adults Aged 50 and Older in a 12-year Follow-Up Analysis in Mexico. *Research on Aging*. 44 (9-10), 758-769.
- NHS (2019). The NHS Long Term Plan. NHS. Retrieved from: www.longtermplan.nhs.uk [Accessed 2nd February 2023].
- Pessoa, R. F., Neves, C. M., & Ferreira, M. E. C. (2019). Dance therapy in aging: A systematic review. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*. 19(2), 1180-1187.
- Reinhardt, G. Y., Vidovic, D., and Hammerton, C. (2021). Understanding loneliness: A systematic review of the impact of social prescribing initiatives on loneliness. *Perspectives in Public Health*. 141(4), 204-213.
- Roberson Jr., D. N., and Pelclova, J. (2014). Social Dancing and Older Adults: Playground for Physical Activity. *Ageing International*. 39, 124-143.

- Skingley, A., De'Ath, S., and Napleton, L. (2016). Evaluation of edna: Arts and dance for older people. *Working with older people*. 20, 46-56.
- Southcott, J., and Joseph, D. (2019). "If you can breathe, you can dance". Fine lines contemporary dance for mature bodies in Melbourne, Australia. *Journal of Women & Aging*. 32(6), 591-610.
- Spencer, M. (2020). An Evaluation of the Elders' Dance Company Pilot Programme. Retrieved from: http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/12954/1/Spencer_Melinda_2020_An_Evaluation_of_the_Elders_Dance_Company_pilot_programme.pdf [Accessed 22nd August 2023].
- Spencer, M. (2021). An Evaluation of the Elders' Dance Company – Phase 2. Retrieved from: http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/15691/1/An_Evaluation_of_the_Elders_Dance_Company_Phase_2_Final.pdf [Accessed 22nd August 2023].
- The King's Fund (2020). What is social prescribing? The King's Fund. Retrieved from: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/social-prescribing> [Accessed 1st October 2022].
- Vella-Burrows, T., Pickard A., Wilson, L., Clift, S., & Whitfield, L. (2021). 'Dance to Health': An evaluation of health, social and dance interest outcomes of a dance programme for the prevention of falls. *Arts Health*. 13(2), 158-172.
- Wakefield, J. R. H., Kellezi, B., Stevenson, C., McNamara, N., Bowe, M., Wilson, I., Halder, M. M., and Mair, E. (2022). Social prescribing as a 'social cure': A longitudinal study of the health benefits of social connectedness within a social prescribing pathway. *Journal of Health Psychology*. 27(2), 386-396.

APPENDIX A

Table 1 – Coding of telephone interviews and end of term questionnaires

| Code | Extract details | Theme |
|--|---|---|
| Challenged and confused | P1, int 2, L18. I don't know, I just found it a bit confused. But quite often I go home then and look at the clip and then practice a bit and that stops me getting confused next time. | Mind and body |
| Practicing at home | P1, int 2, L32. I thought, 'We've got the clip so when I get home I'll look at it, break it down slowly and practice myself', so that was fine. | Investment in dance and group? |
| Out of the house, being and chatting with others | P1, int 2, L44. I find it really beneficial ; it gets me out of the house, because some of my health regimes are quite solo, like walking and using my exercise bike so it's really good to get out of the house. And as time's gone by, chatting a little more to the other participants. | Social connectedness – Dance is sociable |
| Physically manageable | P1, int 2, L54. ...Physically, it's aimed nicely at me; it's something my body can manage well, which is nice. | Mind and body |
| Wants to see the dance group continue | P1. Int 2, L86. | Investment in the group |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | I would like to see some more (dancers) because I want it to thrive | |
| Social connections extending outside of dance hour | P1, int 2, L100. ...every half term we go and have a coffee, or a cup of tea or whatever, somewhere so again we did that last time and that was really lovely too. In fact we had quite a few giggles , which is good. | Social connectedness - extending beyond the dance hour |
| Pleased, happy to have completed the dance class | P1, int 2, L116. Yes, generally I'm really happy; really happy that I've been and feel great, I'm pleased I've done that. | Enhanced mood/Enjoyment? Enhanced feelings and emotions |
| Prevents boredom in physical activity | P1, int 2, L131. ...it's good to have that dance session once a week to stimulate me and my interest in doing something physical. | Mind and body |
| Dance classes are not a solitary activity | P1, int 2, L138. Even yoga, although I'm in a room with other people you are very much doing it on your own. Whereas with this (dance class), because they paired us up with people and we have a bit of a giggle in between, it's rather nice. | Social connectedness - Dance is sociable |
| Inclusivity. Structure of the class. | P1, int 2, L159. I actually like the structure of the session and the flexibility. Both (instructors) are aware that | Inclusive and accessible |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| | different people have different needs for support within the group and they will adapt as and when. I think that's really brilliant. | |
| Value for money, affordability | P1, int 2, L169. | Inclusive and accessible |
| Shared experience | P1, int 1, L27 It's good to be with people who are in a similar situation | Social connectedness - shared experience |
| Cognitive process | P1, int 1, L23 It's good for cognitive process, trying to remember things, | Mind and body |
| Room smell | P1, int 1, L34 The thing that everybody doesn't like, it's that horrible smell of the room | External negatives |
| Daunting first session interactions | P1, int 1, L55 [talking about first session] Very few people actually made eye contact with me and I felt a bit insecure because of that. | Social connectedness - making social connections |
| Socialising outside of classes | P1, int 1, L65 I went and had a cup of tea and cake with, I think, just three ladies from our group...they were really welcoming, it was really lovely. | Social connectedness - outside of class |
| Feeling included | P1, int 1, L75 People made an effort to actually include me in conversations. I noticed | Inclusive - accepted in group |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | that and it was a really nice feeling. | |
| Stretched physically and mentally | P1, int 1, L136 It does stretch me a little bit | Mind and body |
| Value for money | P1, int 1, L161 I still think it's priced really competitive | Inclusive and accessible - price |
| Pleased at ability to remember routines | P1, int 3, L23 I seem to have them under my belt a bit more. So yes, I feel very happy about that | Enhanced mood - remembering routines |
| Concern for numbers | P1, int 3, L44 It's just a bit worrying that we're not getting some new people in. | Investment in group |
| Want for others to benefit the same | P1, int 3, L59 I get so much from it, I just feel it's a shame that other people are not getting that too. | Investment in group - appreciate the benefits |
| Uplifting | P1, int 3, L88 It just lifts your mood | Enhanced mood |
| Not respected in the venue | P1, int 3, L114 The royal and derrogate don't give us the respect we deserve. [talking about interruptions] | External negatives |
| Others (venue) don't see importance | P1, int3, L122 We're doing something quite important P1, int 3, L139 It was intrusive | Investment in class - importance of being there. |
| Sequences are challenging the mind | P2, int 1, L19 Memorising the different parts of the sequence is quite tricky so I think it's good for me | Mind and body |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Relaxed environment | P2, int 1, L37 A relaxed, fun environment to be in | Inclusive - environment |
| Exercising the mind and body | P2, int 1, L39 A little bit of exercise at the same time, for my body and my brain. | Mind and body |
| Uplifting | P2, int 1, L83 I feel quite uplifted. | Enhanced mood |
| Room smell | P2, int 1, L102 The smell as you come into the room | External negatives |
| Concern over lack of numbers | P2, int 1, L118 My concern that the numbers have dropped and maybe they'll call a halt to it. | Investment in group - concern for numbers |
| Socialising with others outside of class | P2, int 2, L47 I am going to coffee with the others so that will be an opportunity to get to know people a bit better, so that's good | Social connectedness - new friends |
| Acceptance | P2, int 2, L52 I feel very accepted | Inclusive - accepting group |
| Physical and mental workout | P2, int 2, L72 I feel I've had a bit of a workout physically as well as mentally | Mind and body |
| Elevated | P2, int 2, L73 I feel elevated | Enhanced mood |
| Disappointment at small numbers | P2, int 3, L24 There were fewer people which was a shame | Investment in group |
| Enjoy partnered dancing | P2, int 3, L36 | Social connectedness - dancing with a partner |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| | I was with somebody that I speak to but it was just good fun to dance with her | |
| Relaxing | P2, int 3, L48 I felt very relaxed and felt as though I'd had a good time | Enhanced mood |
| Workout | P2, int 3, L60 I feel as though I've had a bit of a workout | Mind and body |
| Want them to continue | P2, int 3, L67 I just don't want them stop | Investment in group |
| Have a laugh | P2, int 3, L77 [when discussing how they would promote to others] I just said how much fun it is, what a laugh it is | Enhanced mood |
| Doing some good | P2, int 4, L37 I think it's such a laugh and hopefully doing some good at the same time | Mind and body |
| Enjoy dancing with other people | P2, int 4, L52 I thought that was a hoot, particularly dancing with other people | Social connectedness - dancing together |
| Friendly bunch of people | P2, int 4, L74 Very relaxed, very friendly bunch | Social connectedness - friendly group |
| Elevated | P2, int 4, L84 I feel a bit elevated, just good really | Enhanced mood |
| Leave feeling good | P3, int 1, L17 I feel quite good after them | Enhanced mood |
| Physically and mentally stretching | P3, int 1, L22 Stretching the mind and stretching the body at the same time | Mind and body |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Friendly group | P3, int 1, 34 Everyone seems quite a nice bunch | Social connectedness - initial interactions |
| Elevated mood | P3, int 1, L67 I feel quite stretched and feel quite generally good in myself | Enhanced mood |
| Friendly group | P3, int 2, L75 It's a nice bunch of people and everyone seems to fit in really well. | Social connectedness - group dynamics |
| Socialising outside of class | P3, int 2, L82 We went for coffee on the last day | Social connectedness |
| Invigorating | P3, int 2, L87 I feel quite invigorated | Enhanced mood |
| Impacting mind and body | P3, int 2, L93 Physically I think it helps with my balance a little bit more. And mentally, having a laugh and talking to people that's really good | Mind and body |
| Does me good all round | P3, int 3, L17 Very uplifting, and I think it does me good all round in mind and body | Mind and body |
| Energising and grounding experience | P3, int 3, L31 You feel a lot more energised and perhaps a bit more, I don't know grounded | Enhanced mood |
| Challenging | P3, int 3, L37 I think it's a bit of a challenge so it's good for the brain and such | Mind and body |
| Making friends | P3, int 3, L73 | Social connectedness - making friends |

| | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| | Just making friends and having the comfortable feeling together | |
| Wellbeing | P3, int 3, L108 A feeling of wellbeing | Enhanced mood |
| Welcoming and supportive | P4, int 1, L31 Everyone was really welcoming and...it was a really supportive and sort of caring aspect to it | Inclusive – welcoming environment |
| Connected by motive | P4, int 1, L39 There for the same reason | Social connectedness |
| Felt normal | P4, int 1, L49 I felt probably more normal than I have felt in a year | Enhanced mood |
| Locked doors could be off putting | P4, int 1, L76 The doors are locked when you get there P4, int 1, L82 It could be off putting | External Negatives |
| Inspired to return to more exercise | P4, int 1, L106 It has inspired me to go back to that as well [ballet fitness class] | Inspiring |
| No pressure environment | P4, int 1, L107 There's no pressure, erm everything is done quite slowly | Inclusive |
| Safe environment | P4, int 1, L112 It felt very safe there | inclusive |
| Friendship | P4, int 1, L121 There's that aspect as well, the friendship aspect | Social connectedness – making friends |
| Physically challenging but mentally beneficial | P4, int 1, L166 Physically it triggered a few of my symptoms | Mind and body |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | P4, int 1, L186 Mentally I felt good for having the exercise | |
| Uplifting | P4, int 1, L188 I felt my mood was very good, it really lifted me | Enhanced mood |
| Feeling relieved | P4, int 1, L196 I got upset [in the evening] and I think it was it was just almost a relief of feeling back to normal | Inspirational |
| Caring and supportive | P4, int 1, L208 The joy of being able to do something in a very caring, supportive environment | Inclusive |
| Want to spread the word | P4, int 1, L266 People don't seem to know about | Investment in group |
| Energising | Respondent (R) 2 - Questionnaire 1, Q3 I find I enjoy it and feel energised at the end | Enjoyment/ enhanced mood |
| Uplifting | R3, quest 1, Q3 Positive and Uplifting | Enhanced mood |
| Energizes the mind and body | R6, Questionnaire 1, Q3 I feel that it's mentally and physically energising | Mind and body |
| New possibilities | R7, Questionnaire 1, Q3 I feel it has opened up new possibilities for me | Inspirational |
| New friends | R9, questionnaire, Q3 I have made some great friends | Social connectedness |
| Sociable movement | R11 questionnaire 1, Q3 Enjoy moving about in a sociable way. | Social connectedness |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Encouraging participation by all | R13, questionnaire 1, Q3 Make sure everyone can participate, even if they can't do certain movements. There is never any judgement of limitations | Inclusive |
| Move within own limits | R14, questionnaire 1, Q3 Even when I had sciatica it helped mobility as we can do each movement to our own physical limit | Inclusive and accessible |
| | R7, questionnaire 1, Q4 Joyous, relaxed, energised | Enhanced mood |
| | R6, questionnaire 1, Q6 Knowledge that I can do completely new activities and learn, albeit slowly. | Inspirational |
| Love for dance | R10, questionnaire 1, Q6 Reigniting my love for dance | Inspirational |
| Best kept secret | R13, questionnaire 1, Q7 This is one of Northampton's best kept secrets! The group is really good, it should be duplicated all over the country. | Investment in group |
| Dingy room | R5, questionnaire 1, Q8 The room we use is dingy and smelly | External negatives |
| Venue had impacted on mood | R7, questionnaire 1, Q8 Royal and Derngate is a bit bleak and this impacted on my mood but does not outweigh other benefits | External negatives |
| More recognition | R7, questionnaire 1, Q9 | Investment in group |

| | | |
|--|---|----------------------|
| | I would like to see more recognition of the group, it's leaders and the benefits to be had | |
| Social aspect is almost as important as the class itself | R13, questionnaire 1, Q9 The comradery, the chat over coffee afterwards is almost as important as the class | Social connectedness |
| Inspiring tutors | R2, questionnaire 2, Q3 I am so inspired by their creativity and gracefulness | inspirational |
| Fun workout for mind and body | R2, questionnaire 2, Q3 A fun activity providing a physical and mental workout | Mind and body |
| Socialise outside of class | R3, questionnaire 2, Q3 I have made friends who I see outside of the group | Social connectedness |
| Physical and mental benefits | R4, questionnaire 2, Q3 Classes generally help my physical movement and mental wellbeing | Mind and body |
| Peers make the sessions enjoyable | R7, questionnaire 2, Q3 Easy to get on with fellow dance students, who together make it a thoroughly enjoyable experience | Social connectedness |
| Mental and physical exercise | R2, questionnaire 2, Q6 Mental exercise - I can see a small improvement in my capacity to remember routines and coordination. 2. Physical exercise - I feel re-energised and bouncy | Mind and body |
| | R7, questionnaire 2, Q6 | Inspirational |

| | | |
|---|---|----------------------|
| | Knowledge – 1. I can still learn new things! 2. I can mix in a group | |
| Fun | R7, questionnaire 2, Q6 Pleasure – dancing is fun! Being sociable is fun! | Enhanced mood |
| Improved memory | R2, questionnaire 2, Q7 More improvement in my memory | Mind and body |
| Want to see recognition for instructors | R3, questionnaire 2, Q8 It would be lovely to see [dance instructors names] get the recognition they deserve | Investment in group |
| Ageing is (less) scary | R1, questionnaire 2, Q9 Ageing is scary – I am inspired by dancing with others a little ahead of me | Inspirational |
| Only social activity in the week | R1, questionnaire 2, Q9 My weekly session with [dance instructors names] is the only thing when I interact with others | Social connectedness |
| Inspired to do your best | R3, questionnaire 2, Q9 [dance instructors names] inspire you to do better but also that your best is always good enough | Inspirational |

APPENDIX B

Weekly Collages

Figure 1 – Open Class (end of term 1)

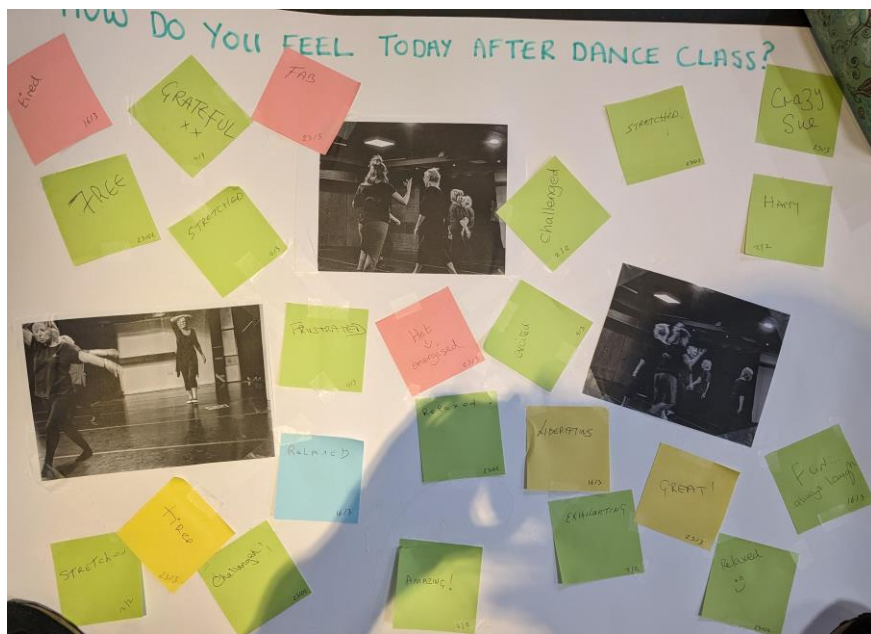


Figure 2 – Open Class (end of term 2)

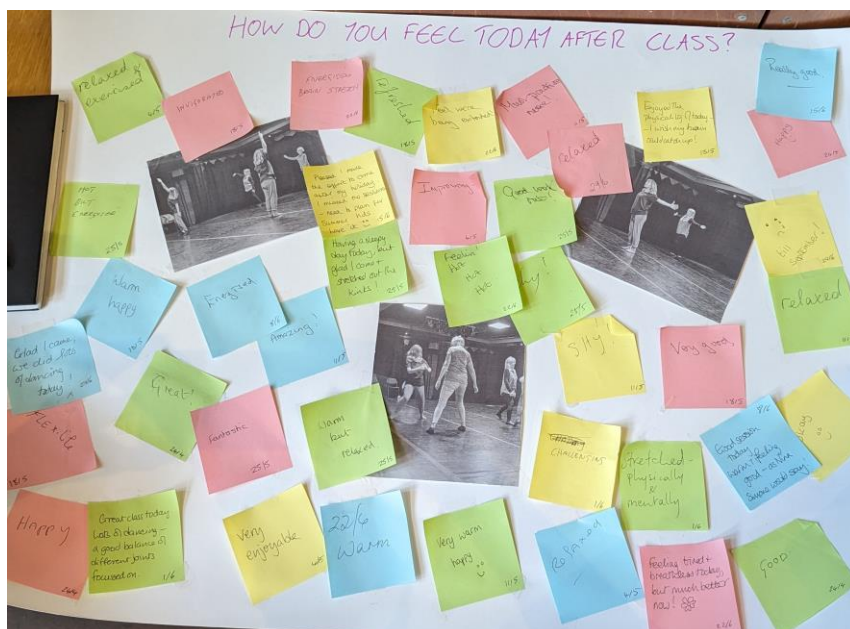


Figure 3 – Performance Company (end of term 1)

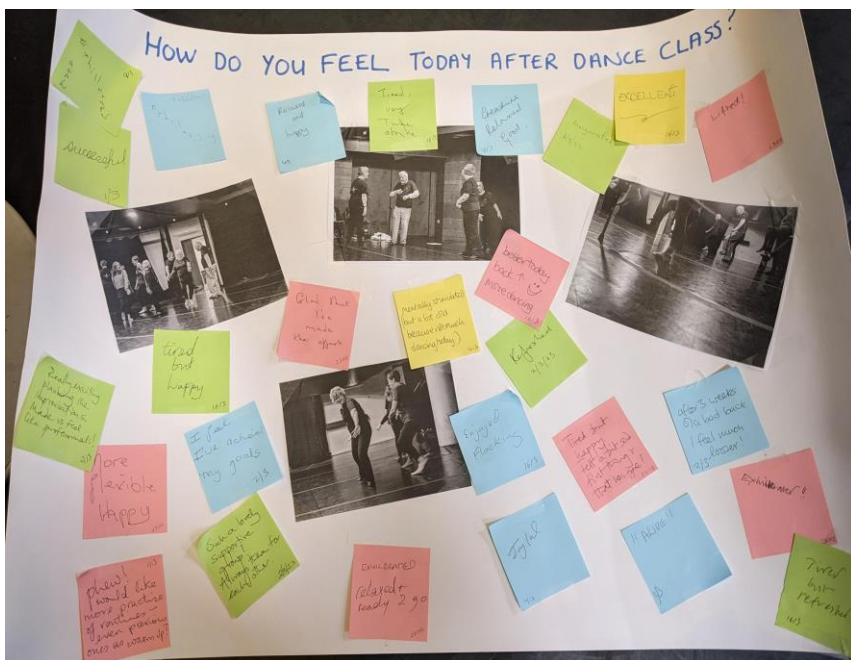
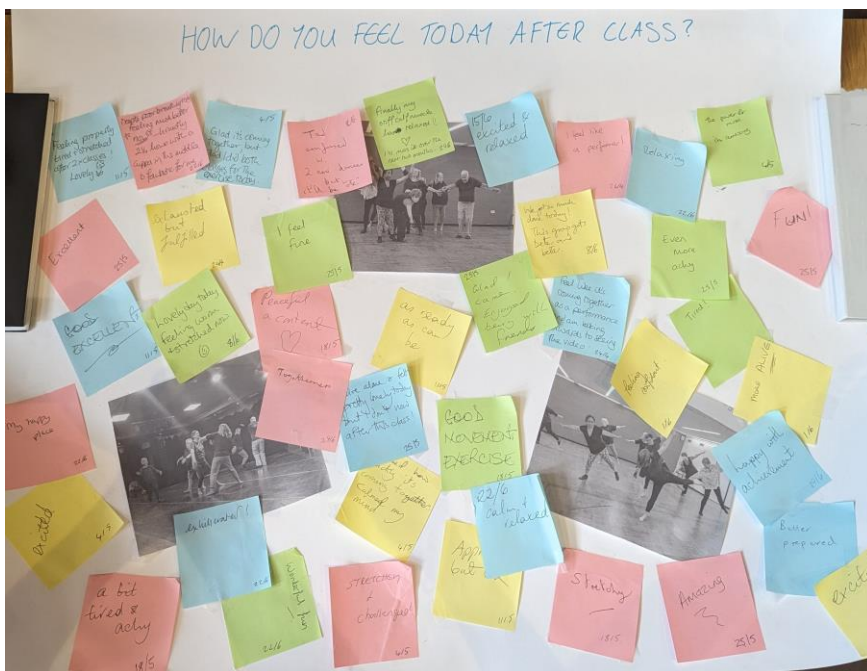


Figure 4 – Performance Company (end of term 2)



APPENDIX C

Table 3 – Coding for facilitator and SPLW interviews

| Coding | Phrase | Theme |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| Wanted it to work | P1, INT 1 very difficult and very disappointing | Disappointment |
| Poor communication | P1, INT 1 we have not managed to have a productive conversation with them [link workers] | Communication |
| Want information/reasoning for | P1, INT 1 (in relation to lack of referrals) would be really interesting to know why | Communication/information |
| Dedicated link worker | P1, INT 1 have a dedicated link worker for each organisation to make communication easy | communication |
| Need for clear process to support promotion | P1, INT 1 A clear process for organisations to add an activity, and manage what information participants are privy to | Promotion |
| Lack of cohesion between organisations | P2, int 1 seemed to be lack of cohesion across the town on how Spring was rolling out. | Communication |
| Lack of updates/responses | P2, INT 1 suddenly went very quiet once we started to investigate whether referrals were being made once the project was live. | communication |

| | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Advertising attracted no referrals | P2, INT 1 (talking about promotion and advertising) but still no avail. | Disappointment |
| SPRING restructure impacted on success | P2, INT 1 [the restructuring of SPRING had a]detrimental impact on keeping lines of communication consistent, and thinking on it, it was this point that things became challenging to move forward. | communication |
| One sided communication | P2, INT 1 communication from all teams stopped despite regular reminders from ourselves, leaving us blinded in how to move forward. | communication |
| SP teams difficult to communicate with | P2, INT 1 due to the management of the SP teams being challenging to communicate with. | Communication |
| Process to improve communication | P2, INT 1 aligning link workers to be responsible for supporting and communicating with the external partners, | Communication - clear pathways |
| Sporadic communication | P1, INT 2 (following a successful initial conversation) And nothing. There was no communication from Debbie from that email | Communication - sporadic |
| New process for spreading word to link workers | P1, INT 2 invite people to come and present their programme to | Promotion |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | the social prescribers and the social prescribers then know what's going on | |
| Difficult for SP and public to navigate to suitable programme | P1, INT 2 we are just another programme in a big pool of lots of various activities | matchmaking |
| Confused by process | P1, INT 2 So again sometimes it feels quite fragmented - who leads what, who does what. | Communication - unclear who to approach |
| | P1, INT 2 she said, 'If I'm honest with you, it just falls within the bottom of my emails sometimes because I get loads of people emailing the same thing: | Communication |
| Need for consolidation/directory | P1, INT 2 what it looks like is missing is there just being something that consolidates all the programme | Promotion |
| Poor organisation | P1, INT 2 I think they're just fumbling a little bit, to be honest | disappointment |
| Need to understand barriers | P1, INT 2 So even with their enthusiasm there's still a barrier that's stopping people coming forward. | Disappointment |
| Waste of time | P2, INT 2 I feel a bit disillusioned with it really. I feel it's almost a total waste of time for so many people. | Disappointment |

| | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Finding services that match the individual | SPLW 1 Find out what matters to 'me', and we link them into the other services that are around | Matchmaking |
| Collaboration between GPA, Age UK, and Northants Carers | SPLW 1 we have clients that are just on the border and there's a lot of collaboration between us and things. | Matchmaking across organisations |
| Work to get people out the house | SPLW 1 for people who really lack that motivation, we could go to them and coax them out. | Motivations |
| Work to empower self-motivation | SPLW 1 the aim is to empower, so we'll take them there the first time and then slowly step away | Motivations |
| Support independence | SPLW 1 It's all about enablement. | Motivations |
| Directory of activities coming soon | SPLW 1 Well-being launchpad. Yes, so that's coming soon | Promotion |
| Platform to promote groups/sessions | SPLW 1 so we have the marketplace once a month and the COP once a month, and we invite people onto the marketplace to present. What their service is and on that call we now have umm all the Spring link workers | Promotion |
| Platforms for promotion | SPLW 1 | promotion |

| | | |
|--|--|-------------|
| | then we have the communities of practice, which is a face to face service and we invite guest speakers into that | |
| Group chat for link workers from all organisations | SPLW 1 whenever anybody goes anywhere where there's something new going on and they picked up a poster or anything, they take a picture and it's shared in that group chat. | Promotion |
| Difficult getting consistent engagement | SPLW 1 So as part of the social prescribing world, it's just it's so many factors. You know, it's like the weather, then getting somebody out, | Motivations |
| Find activities suited to individual | SPLW 1 I mean we can only do what people want to do. | Matchmaking |
| Finding the 'hook' to get people in the door | SPLW 1 it's getting the right hook, isn't it? It's the hook that you need | Promotion |
| Right person, right time | SPLW 1 it is literally the one person at the right time and boom, it'll take off | Matchmaking |
| Importance of demonstrations | SPLW 1 it's finding out the groups and getting Tina's group to come and do a demo | Promotion |
| Finding right people for the group | SPLW 1 it's people will only do what they want to do. | matchmaking |

| | | |
|---|---|-------------------------|
| | And it is hard. | |
| Not the interest from clients | SPLW 2 it's just that we haven't really had much match sort of interest or much call for it to be honest. | matchmaking |
| Past experiences impact on motivation | SPLW 2 Other people will eventually been let down and and this has a knock-on effect for their motivation | Motivations |
| Difficult without demonstration | SPLW 2 trying to get that across to people without them actually experiencing what it looks like, it can be difficult and very daunting for people. | Promotion |
| Lack motivation for continued engagement | SPLW 2 trying to get people to commit to something can be quite difficult as well. | Motivations |
| In person promotion | SPLW 2 we take the promotional material with us when we go into the community | Promotion |
| Might be right group but not accessible due to transport | SPLW 2 making sure that they can get to some thing and the town centre, be an issue for some | Matchmaking – realistic |
| Some interested but their physical abilities make it unsuitable | SPLW 2 [Speaking about interest from individual with poor mobility and limited transport links] thinking `does she like the the just the idea of the | Matchmaking – realistic |

| | | |
|---|--|-------------------------|
| | groups? Does she understand?' | |
| Complex conditions make commitment and motivation difficult | SPLW 2 Quite often they are dealing with conditions that affect their mobility, their pain management, those things you know, and from experience, how you feel today is not how you're going to feel tomorrow. | Matchmaking – realistic |
| Promotional events poorly attended | SPLW 2 do some showcasing it was very poorly attended by the community. | Promotion |
| Hit and miss attendance | SPLW 2 you do try and support them and meet them halfway, and they still don't turn up. It's very, very hit and miss and it's very, very hard | Motivation |
| Pandemics impact | SPLW 2 the pandemic has made people more comfortable with not putting themselves out there | Motivation |
| Takes time | SPLW 2 But it really does take time to get, you know the following. | Promotion |
| More personable promotion | SPLW 2 I think having quotes sometimes can get missed, whereas if it's a click on | Promotion |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>video and somebody saying you know that they lost their social circle or they were bereaved and they didn't know what to do with themselves and you know this is the impact it's had on me.</p> | |
|--|--|--|

Report compiled by:

**Dr Melinda Spencer and Eadie Simons
Faculty of Arts, Science and Technology
The University of Northampton
Waterside Campus
University Drive
Northampton
NN1 5PH**

Melinda.spencer2@northampton.ac.uk

Funded by the University of Northampton's Support for Innovation & Research Ideas, Policy & Participation

