

Blog: Dance On in Doncaster

If you can breathe you can dance!

Here at darts, our motto is 'the art of taking part', with making art accessible to everyone being at the very heart of what we do as an organisation.

Dance On uses evidence-based approaches to design and deliver a programme that improves health and wellness in people over 50 by reducing falls, increasing mobility and encouraging gentle exercise and movement in participants' day-to-day lives. Professional artists deliver Dance On sessions at The Point and in a range of venues across the Doncaster borough. As well as the physical benefit it brings, Dance On also provides participants with a space to meet new people, gain confidence and skills, and improve mental wellbeing in a way that is free, accessible, and inclusive. Dancer, Alice Henry has written this Blog to describe her experience of delivering Dance On.



'If you can breathe you can dance' is the entire ethos and belief we passionately communicate and lead by here at Dance On. This quote that Charlotte Armitage, Core Artist and Project Manager of Dance On Doncaster, leads by, and is the response I often give to potential participants when doubting their ability to join in a Dance On session. Removing the pressure, expectations and obstacles that are often associated with dancing has led to a continually growing and thriving community of dancers in Doncaster over the age of fifty-five - flourishing physically, socially, and mentally.

Everyone's route to Dance On is different, and no two journeys look the same once you start attending, but what is undeniable for every participant, is that Dance On goes beyond a dance session.

Over the time I have been leading and assisting at Dance On, I have witnessed participants' physical, social and emotional development, felt the warmth of the welcoming room, the joy of escapism through movement, and the way in which Dance On provides a pillar of support for its participants. I have had the privilege of getting to know these participants and seen the communities build, which is something I feel so fortunate to be a part of.

For many participants, their reason for attending Dance On is initially to increase physicality and/or to expand their social opportunities. Participants soon begin to realise that the seeds that they sowed in attending their first session, soon develop into a full harvesting of benefits,



that they did not expect to reap the rewards of upon first joining the group.

The Dance On session is made up of a three-pronged approach; Accessible Exercise/Physical Activity, Community/Social Activity, and Nostalgic Uplifting Musical Escapism/Mental Activity. Each of element of this triad serves as the mental, physical and social elements which drive participants to come and continue to return to Dance On.

I often feel that one of the elements of this triad is the driving force for the participant's attending, and then the other elements organically grow as Dance On becomes a part of a participant's life. An example would be that a participant comes to Dance On with the intention of increasing their physical activity. Over time, however, they begin benefitting from the social aspect of finding a new group of friends that they enjoy spending time with both inside and outside of the Dance On session. An additional benefit is then experienced: having found the carving out of one hour a week for themselves to experience the joy of movement and escapism through music, they discover that it also truly benefits their overall wellbeing.

The inclusive and accessible nature of the Dance On sessions, which take place in several different venues across the Doncaster borough, means that whatever place a participant finds themselves in, at any stage in their life, Dance On can always be accessed. Whether it's joining in seated or standing, attending weekly or as and when possible, attending with a friend or alone, or attending multiple Dance On sessions a week, there is a way for everyone to be welcomed with open arms upon their arrival.

As a team of dance artists, we strive to provide the very best of participatory, social dance. We are passionate about dance being for everyone, whether experienced or not, and make it our mission for participants to feel joyfully fulfilled upon leaving the session, with a sense of curiosity, excitement and anticipation for the next time they return.

If you haven't found out about darts, our variety of Arts & Health or Arts & Education programmes running across Doncaster or our more specifically our Dance On programme, then have a look at our website: www.wearedarts.org.uk