

# A Service Evaluation of *Move Dance Feel*

## A Dance Project for Women Living With or Beyond Cancer



Evaluator: Dr Kate Wakeling, supported by  
*Move Dance Feel* Founder Emily Jenkins



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

**TRINITY LABAN CONSERVATOIRE  
OF MUSIC & DANCE**



**Paul's Cancer  
Support Centre**



This project was generously supported by Arts Council England, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, the Wimbledon Foundation, *Move Dance Feel* patrons and public donations via Crowdfunder (April 2018), and by three cancer support organisations: Macmillan Social Prescribing at Bromley by Bow Centre, Maggie's Barts and Paul's Cancer Support Centre.

### **Dr Kate Wakeling**

Kate is a researcher in the participatory arts, with a particular interest in arts in health work. She studied music at Cambridge University and holds a PhD in music and anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies. Kate was a Research Fellow at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance from 2012-2017, where she was embedded in the institution's Learning and Participation Department (Music and Dance), investigating and disseminating the impact of the conservatoire's diverse participatory programmes. Kate has worked as an independent researcher and evaluator for a wide range of arts projects and programmes, including Sing Up, Greenwich Dance, Fairbeats! and Sound Connections.

wakeling.kate@gmail.com

### **Emily Jenkins**

PgDip, MA

Emily has worked within participatory dance for ten years and is specialised in the area of Dance and Health, with a particular interest in the relationship between creativity and wellbeing. She works with a range of dance, community and health organisations in both artistic delivery and dance development roles. In 2016 she founded *Move Dance Feel* and works in partnership with cancer support organisations to integrate dance into their care programmes.

Emily has an interest in dancing with people who face social isolation and life limiting illness which has led her to deliver in a range of diverse settings. Her artistic practice is centred around connection as she aims to bring people together via creativity and physicality, over and above social and cultural divides.

www.emily-jenkins.com  
emilyjanejenkins@gmail.com

**Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance** is an international artistic and educational community that brings together performers and practitioners to train, collaborate, research and perform in inspiring creative, intellectual and physical spaces.

Research is at the core of Trinity Laban's mission and informs their teaching activity. Trinity Laban's Learning and Participation (Dance) Department part funded the *Move Dance Feel* service evaluation as part of their portfolio of Dance and Health research, interested in the relationship between research and practice.

www.trinitylaban.ac.uk/research

*All photo credits: Camilla Greenwell*

## Contents

1.	<b>Overview of the Project</b> .....	4
2.	<b><i>Move Dance Feel</i> Creative Practice</b> .....	5
3.	<b>Evaluation Methodology</b> .....	7
4.	<b>Evaluation Findings</b>	
	4.1 Other Cancer Support Activities.....	8
	4.2 Initial Impetus for Attending.....	8
	4.3 A Rich Spectrum of Well-Being Enhancement	
	4.3.1 Positive Emotion.....	9
	4.3.2 Connection.....	11
	4.3.3 Self-Expression & Creativity .....	12
	4.3.4 Accomplishment.....	14
	4.3.5 Subjective Well-Being: The Flourishing Scale.....	15
	4.4 Stress and Anxiety.....	16
	4.5 Body Image.....	17
	4.6 Energy and Fatigue.....	18
	4.7 Getting Moving.....	20
	4.8 Impact on Friends and Family.....	21
5.	<b>Key Findings</b> .....	22
6.	<b>Bibliography</b> .....	25

## 1. Overview of the Project

*Move Dance Feel* is a creative dance project for women recovering from or affected by cancer, including those who are supporting someone with cancer. The project was founded in 2016 to explore what participatory dance could offer in the context of cancer recovery and to address a recognised need for post-treatment support.

Evidence shows that 70% of people struggle with physical and emotional side effects between one and ten years after cancer treatment (Macmillan 2013). Reported side effects include tension, weight changes, pain, restricted movement, severe fatigue, stress, anxiety, depression, fear, low self-esteem, disturbances in body image, and many more ill health factors.

Between April 2018 and April 2019 *Move Dance Feel* worked in partnership with three leading cancer support organisations across London: Bromley by Bow Centre with Macmillan Social Prescribing, Maggie's Barts and Paul's Cancer Support Centre. The project was open to all adult women aged 18+ and offered free, weekly dance sessions centred around artistic practice, where women could come together 'to dance instead of talk about their cancer experience'.

94 women engaged with *Move Dance Feel* during this 12-month period. The women who participated had undergone, or were undergoing, treatment for a wide range of cancer types, including breast cancer, lung cancer, leukaemia, cancer of the spine, head, neck and jaw, colon cancer, gastric cancer, ovarian cancer, bowel cancer and eye cancer. Participants came from diverse backgrounds, attended from East, Central and South West London, and ranged in age from 30 to 75.



## 2. *Move Dance Feel* Creative Practice

*Move Dance Feel* sessions happen weekly across academic term time. Sessions last for two hours and combine dynamic and creative movement activities with playful opportunities for interaction, and with scope too for reflection and relaxation. Sessions typically begin with warm-up exercises followed by movement exploration, creative tasks and partner/group work. There is a particular focus on the physicality of dance, artistic exploration and creative collaboration, with time at the end of the sessions for cool down and a guided relaxation exercise.

As lead artist of the project, Emily Jenkins describes her creative practice as 'centred around connection: to the art form, as a creative and physical form of self expression; to the self, to encourage a greater understanding of, and enjoyment in, the body; to others, to build social cohesion and meaningful relationships through positive, shared experience.' This approach places creativity, physicality and community at the heart of the work, offering participants person-centred and high-quality artistic experiences.

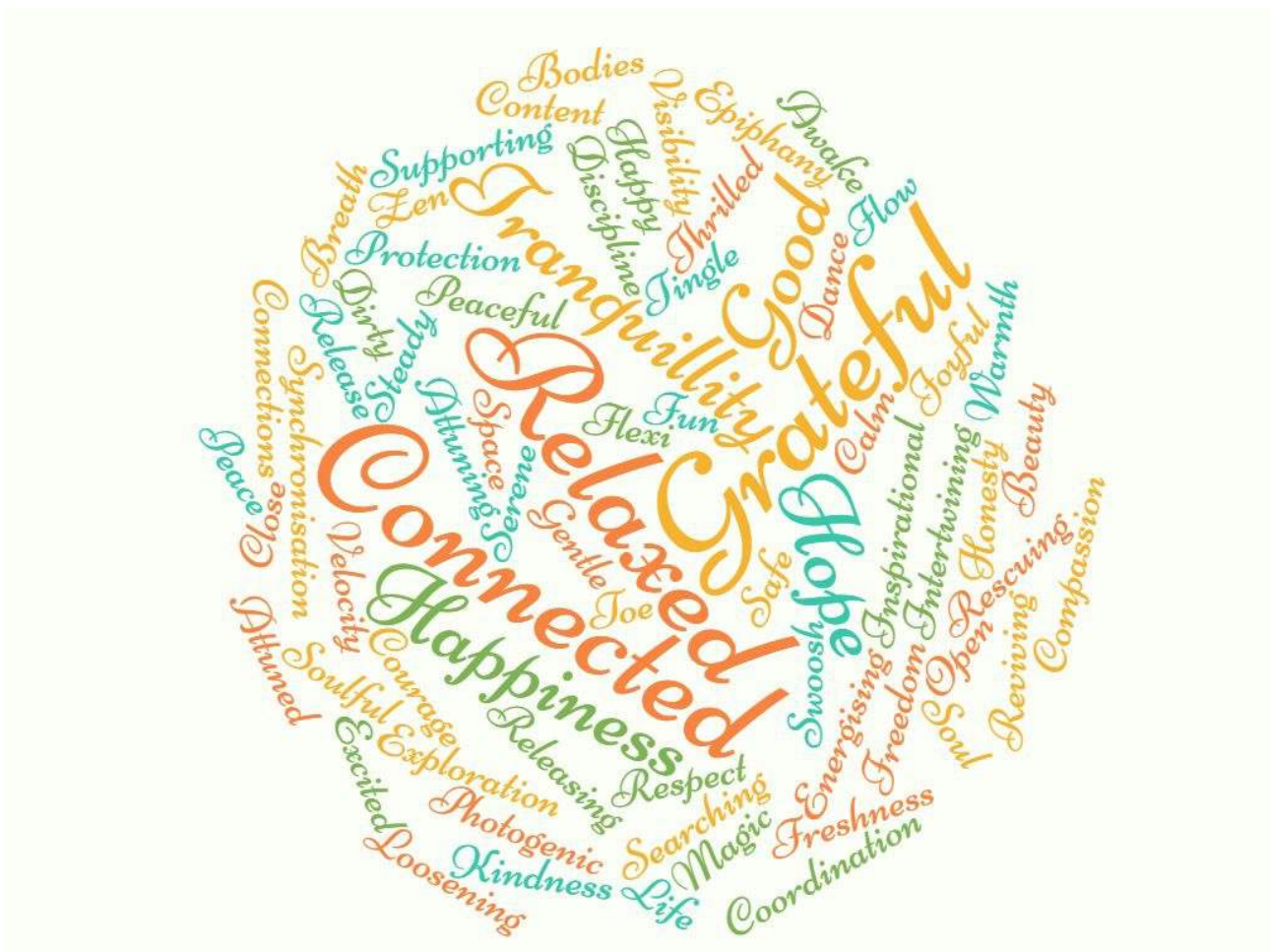
Developed over the three years the project has been running, the creative approach to *Move Dance Feel* involves six key elements of practice. These elements may all be present in a single session or deployed across a series of sessions. The six elements are:

Connection to the Art Form	
1. Fundamental Movement Concepts	<i>Laban's Human Movement Model (action, space, dynamics, body, relationships), improvisation, rhythm/musicality explorations, effort qualities, size/scale</i>
2. Devising and Choreographic Explorations	<i>Play, movement games, choreographic scores, using other artistic stimulus</i>
Connection to the Body	
3. Body Awareness	<i>Using anatomical referencing, somatic techniques and breathwork, encouraging self reflection, attuning</i>
4. Nurturing	<i>A focus on release techniques, use of touch and massage, rest and guided relaxation</i>
Connection to Others	
5. Collaboration	<i>Via partner and group work, use of non verbal communication methods</i>
6. Sharing and Reflection	<i>A sense of seeing and being seen (performance), accommodating social time, discussion (related to dance experience), 'Book of Words' - a ritual that closes every session and 'check in'</i>



Music plays an important role in the sessions, influencing the mood and energy of different tasks and explorations. Music is carefully chosen and features a broad range of tempos and rhythms, with both well-known songs and more abstract and contemporary tracks without lyrics.

Sessions close with a cool-down and relaxation exercise, followed by the 'Book of Words': at the end of each session, participants are invited to suggest a word or phrase to describe their experience of the session or any thoughts or sensations that have risen in response to their participation. These words are recorded by the lead artist in a notebook that has become informally known as the 'Book of Words'. Emily summarises the purpose of this as: 'bringing the group together at the end of each session for a brief communal reflection. It serves as an abstract means of capturing participants' thoughts and responses, and has become a a ritualistic way of closing the sessions. This ritual initiates an open communication, in which each group member speaks and is listened to. It also allows space for participants to respond to one another and illuminate shared experiences.'



*Word cloud from the Move Dance Feel 'Book of Words' at Paul's Cancer Support Centre, July 2018. The larger the word, the more times it had been said.*

### 3. Evaluation Methodology

This service evaluation explored the project from Summer 2018 to Spring 2019. The evaluation was conducted using termly surveys, participant observation and focus group discussions. Surveys were disseminated every term at each site, including a notional 'baseline' survey in Summer 2018 with follow-up surveys in Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019.<sup>1</sup>

40 women engaged with the evaluation – with 26 women taking part in the study across all three terms and completing each of the three surveys.

The first survey investigated participants' reasons for joining *Move Dance Feel* and what other cancer-support activities they currently engage with. The survey asked participants to describe their current feelings about their body image and invited respondents to complete the Flourishing Scale (Diener et. al. 2009) to measure subjective well-being as well as the FACIT Fatigue Scale (version 4).

The two follow-up surveys (Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019) continued to investigate participants' **subjective well-being, body image and levels of fatigue**. In addition, the surveys explored:

- the impact of sessions on participants' **stress and anxiety levels**;
- whether the group offered a sense of **support or connectedness** and what value this feature might hold;
- and the effect of the project's **creative** and **expressive emphasis** on participants.

Following the outcome of focus group discussions, the final survey also included a question asking participants if they felt their participation in *Move Dance Feel* has had an **effect on their friends and family**.

In addition to these surveys, the evaluation was conducted through participant-observation sessions at each of the Centres and through three focus groups in January 2019, where participants were invited to reflect on the project in a relaxed group conversation. Focus group discussions explored similar themes to the surveys, including:

- the impact of sessions on **participants' physical state**, particularly concerning energy levels and fatigue;
- the **psychological/emotional impact** of sessions on participants, including stress, anxiety and well-being;
- how participation may have altered participants' sense of **body image**;
- the impact of the project's **creative work**;
- whether participants perceived a sense of **group identity** and what value this might have;
- how participants would **like to see the sessions develop**;
- and whether there were any **additional outcomes** from participating that the surveys had not yet probed.

Central to our evaluation approach was wanting to create a positive, non-medicalising framework through which participants could discuss their experiences of the project. We were aware that participants come to *Move Dance Feel* for a positive and wholly non-clinical experience, and therefore wanted to ensure that the evaluation process did not jeopardise this through invasive or unenjoyable evaluation encounters. As such, our decisions about survey questions and any standardised measures were governed by the need for this evaluation to reflect the positive tenor of the sessions themselves. We thus carefully selected our evaluation tools (e.g. deploying

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that sessions at Bromley by Bow Centre with Macmillan Social Prescribing have been running since 2016.

Diener's 2009 'Flourishing Scale' which is rare in its entirely positive wording) and scheduled in participant-observation to make sure participants had a chance to interact positively with the evaluator through the medium of the project itself – dance – before the focus group discussions were held.

## 4. Evaluation Findings

Findings are discussed here theme by theme, integrating findings from surveys, participant observation and focus groups.

### 4.1 Other Cancer Support Activities

Surveys explored what other cancer-support activities participants engaged in and results included:

Yoga 33%  
Cancer support group 26%  
Some form of walking 30%  
Mindfulness classes 22%  
Massage therapy 7%  
Singing 7%

22% of all participants attended no other form of cancer-support activity.

### 4.2 Initial Impetus for Attending

The surveys and focus groups asked participants what had first brought them to *Move Dance Feel*. Participants noted the idea of 'positive distraction': the sessions appealed as somewhere to 'focus my mind not on cancer', to 'feel good' and to 'feel free'.

*'I was in touch with MacMillan Social Prescribing and we talked about my needs and I said I just wanted something where I would feel good and they recommended this.'*

*'I was distressed and needing to be taken out of my situation. Chemo takes you out of your body. This pumps oxygen round you.'*

The value of the sessions as somewhere to exercise and be active – with suitable support and expectations – was highlighted by a number of participants:

*'I wanted to have an aim to get active again.'*

*'I decided to join Move Dance Feel to give myself some exercise as my legs are bad and I can't do the strenuous exercise.'*

Other participants spoke of the hope that attendance would have a direct impact on their physical health and sense of 'healing' after cancer:

*'[I joined] to dance my way back to health.'*



*'To help with my energy boosting and healing the body as part of coping with cancer treatment.'*

For some respondents, the fact the sessions would combine physical exercise with something potentially creative, social and fun was an important draw:

*'Doing exercise - in an amazing location - free form without prescribed movement, it is enjoyable and fun.'*

*'[I wanted to do] gentle exercise in a friendly atmosphere.'*

The sense of being in a supportive group with others facing similar challenges was also an important factor for some participants in attending:

*'I wanted to do something physical and do it with women in a similar situation.'*

*'I wanted to return to dance activities since having breast cancer and thought Move Dance Feel would be good to dance with other cancer sufferers as we're all in the same boat.'*

While the promise that the sessions would be creative and offer some artistic freedom was key for several participants:

*'The title appealed. I liked the idea of that it's not prescribed: that you move as you feel and you feel as you move.'*

## **4.3 A Rich Spectrum of Well-being Enhancement**

Both in survey responses and in focus group discussions, participants discussed the many and dynamic ways they perceived their well-being to be enhanced through participation in *Move Dance Feel*. *'It's a **psychological game-changer**, to come here,*' wrote one respondent.

Other comments pointed towards both specifically hedonic ('positive feeling') and specifically eudaimonic ('positive functioning') outcomes of the project for participants. Such a mix of findings aligns with newer, integrated approaches to the study of subjective well-being, as found in Martin Seligman's PERMA model; Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (Seligman, 2011).

We here outline a slightly adjusted model of enhanced well-being focused on the four key dimensions that were specifically voiced by participants themselves through this evaluation: **Positive Emotion, Connection, Self-Expression/Creativity and Accomplishment**.

### **4.3.1. Positive Emotion**

Participant responses to the sessions covered the full gamut of positive emotion, from feelings of intense and energising pleasure and happiness:

*'It makes me feel the absolute joy of being alive.'*

*'In lots of places you're being told to be positive. But this really is positive. It's fun. It's entertaining. It's naughty.'*

*'A feeling of joyfulness, hope and possibility'*

while these sensations were also often mixed with feelings of calm or comfort:

*'I find it very therapeutic, energising, gives me a sense of calm.'*

*'I leave feeling calmed down and just better. It makes you feel happy.'*

*'This is such a beautiful, embracing experience and is so crucial to my feeling of wellbeing. Joyful, enlivening and relaxing all at once.'*

*'Exhilarating, energising and calming at the same time. Magical.'*

These sensations both arose from – and contributed to – participants becoming **'lost in the moment'** through dance, igniting a sense of **release**:

*'A transformative sense of release in being able to explore the inexpressible in a safe and accepting space.'*

*'[I value] so much, really – releasing the body, getting lost in the moment.'*

*'I have days when I feel sad and there's something about the class that puts you in the moment. It reconnects you to your body.'*

*'Escapism – an excuse to play and experiment in a safe and supportive space.'*



### 4.3.2 Connection

Participants often specifically mentioned the idea of ‘connection’ – of ‘making connections both with myself and others’ – through participation in the project.

*‘This is a mix of connecting with myself, others, mind and body, a sense of some tightness unbinding.’*

*‘Because everyone here has had cancer, there’s an important connection. We are human – we are social beings - and you want to dance with others – it’s celebratory.’*

*‘I’ve found a deep connectivity to myself and to others in the group.’*

This reconnecting to the self often came about through the sense of ‘getting to know one’s body again’ after the intense physical changes that may occur through cancer treatment.

*‘Connection – to self – to others. Being in my body. Belonging. Feeling more flexible and helpful in my life. Respite.’*

This connection was only possible through the sense of a ‘safe shared space’, an important feature of the project that participants mentioned frequently.

*‘Safe space of shared experience - sense of community.’*

*‘Dancing with others in a safe, trusting environment enables all participants to relax and connect with others. Move Dance Feel has enabled everyone to do this including me.’*

*‘You build connections with fellow cancer patients in a calm and safe environment.’*

*‘A sense of belonging and quiet solidarity.’*



This 'quiet solidarity' was an important feature of the project for a number of participants, who highlighted the value of forming an intimate connection with others, without necessarily having to share much verbally:

*'We're not being made to be a group. We just are one. We don't have to phone one another up. This is where the group happens. There's no need to make extra effort – we just are. And I think that's to do with being in the space and moving together – that's what makes this connection.'*

*'Strong sense of support - other people in similar situation to discuss things with. The physical aspects of the dancing also bring a physical support and connectedness.'*

*'The unobtrusive awareness that I am part of a group of women who share the experience of cancer, without cancer being the focus, is extremely comforting.'*

#### **4.3.3. Self-Expression and Creativity**

A number of participants reflected on how cancer treatment often depleted them of creative energy and confidence:

*'Creativity's a side of you that totally disappears in treatment.'*

In turn, when then asked what being creative in the space meant to participants, responses highlighted the life-affirming value of creative self-expression:

*'Expansive, humanising, new territory, exploratory and bravery.'*

*'I'm forced to be ME in special moments of creativity.'*

Participants discussed how this sort of self-expression 'opened new pathways', permitting them to express things that had previously been locked away, or allowing individuals to find their way back to ways of being that had been blocked through the experience of illness:

*'I completely lost my creativity through treatment and I owe a lot to Move Dance Feel as it has helped my journey back to a fuller, creative life again.'*

*'I have been able to explore how we can both express feelings that perhaps have no other outlet but really importantly, challenge me to explore moving in new ways that are not patterned. This seems to be opening a wider sense of creativity [and] new brain pathways in other areas of life.'*

*'I enjoy the opportunity for individual interpretation within a loose structure. I feel the class prompts my creativity which I find helpful at a time when the cancer feels out of my control.'*

*'I go to an exercise class at Maggie's and it's an excellent class but here there is this fluidity – a lot of the movement is free and your own choice.'*

For some participants, the idea of 'being creative' was initially rather scary or disconcerting, but participants spoke of their relief and joy at realising they were creative.

*'I didn't think I was very creative. This helps you to explore and to realise that you might be a bit creative after all.'*

*'It's something completely new and very much out of my comfort zone, but enjoying [creative activities] even when finding them difficult.'*

*'I have always said I'm not creative but I feel I can be during sessions.'*

The idea of self-expression and creativity through dance was also highlighted as a key feature of the sessions, where participation invited a particular sense of release and fun:

*'[I'm becoming] less self conscious, feeling the music, letting myself go, learning to be more fluid, having fun'*

*'Self-expression relating to muscle and body movement is very different to when I use creativity elsewhere in my life so as a result it is refreshing, fun and enjoyable.'*



The **quality of creative leadership** was also highlighted as an important feature of the project, with numerous participants commenting on the 'approach and expertise', as one participant expressed it, of the practitioners in guiding fulfilling creative activities:

*'[I value] the opportunity to move and develop movement under expert guidance.'*

It should also be noted that the sessions' creative focus proved more problematic for a small number of participants:

*'[The impact is] minimal I'm afraid as maybe I'm too much of a philistine to see it in that way.'*

*'Sometimes it makes me feel foolish, but it can be fun too.'*



#### 4.3.4 Accomplishment

Many participants spoke of the sense of accomplishment that participating in *Move Dance Feel* gave them. Participants spoke of a sense that they were ‘achieving something after illness’ and a number of survey responses listed ‘a sense of achievement/accomplishment’ as one of the key things that participants ‘take away’ from the sessions:

*‘[I feel] amazement that I can do movements that I thought were impossible to do because of my disability.’*

These feelings of accomplishment often seemed to arise from a sense of challenge and artistic progression in the sessions. This sense of challenge resides, for many participants, in taking part in creative activities which offer mental and physical ‘stretch’ but which also provide space for individuals to challenge themselves as much as they wish:

*‘It’s challenging when we’re working in a group to create a phrase – but it’s good to be challenged in that way. The last thing I’d want is just to be wafting about but the [creative] tasks give you a framework, a clear structure.’*

*‘The leaders challenge you – but there’s no right or wrong answer – but just by suggesting something, like ‘look at this curve’ it challenges you.’*

*‘There’s progression. I value that a lot. We build on what we’ve done. It would feel a huge loss not to have this group to come to.’*



In turn, confronting and coping with these creative challenges in sessions has empowered some participants in other domains of their lives.

*‘I was at a low ebb and trying to find something outside of myself. I wanted some change. I had a lot of negative images about my body and its lack of grace and I decided to throw caution to the wind and say fuck it. In other situations I now feel the same. I want to challenge things.’*

In a similar vein, when another participant was asked what she ‘took away’ from the sessions, she answered:

*‘The realisation that I can cope.’*

#### 4.3.5 Subjective Well-Being: The Flourishing Scale

Alongside providing participants with multiple opportunities to feed back on the project freely, we also included a more formal subjective well-being measure in our surveys. Aiming to keep the tenor of the survey as positive as possible and in line with more holistic views of well-being, that feature an emphasis on concepts such as engagement, hope and creativity (Aspinwall and Staudinger 2003; Peterson and Seligman 2004), we asked participants to complete the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al 2009) in each termly survey.

Diener’s brief 8-item survey measures respondents’ self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. Respondents are asked to indicate their level of agreement (from ‘7 – strongly agree’ to ‘1 – strongly disagree’) with a series of statements such as: ‘My social relationships are supportive and rewarding’; ‘I am engaged and interested in my daily activities’.

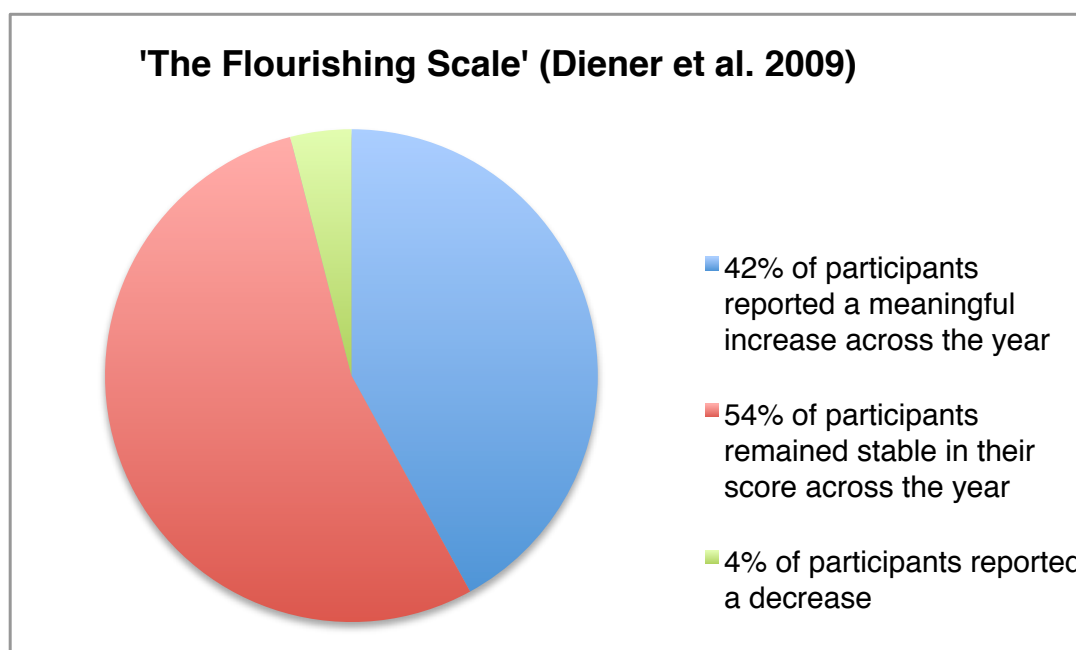
Unlike many subjective well-being surveys, each of the eight sentences are positive in their wording. While respondents are of course still free to answer more negatively about their feelings, we valued this survey as not appearing to bring presuppositions of participant distress or unhappiness to the research encounter, in keeping with the positive and non-clinical thrust of the *Move Dance Feel* project itself.

Results found that across the year, the vast majority of participants either reported their sense of ‘flourishing’ to have increased or to have stayed stable:

42% of participants recorded a meaningful **increase** in score across the year

54% of participants remained at a **stable** score across the year

4% of participants reported a decrease in their score



## 4.4 Stress and Anxiety

A key outcome for many participants was the positive impact of the sessions on feelings of stress and anxiety. Numerous participants noted how sessions alleviated such feelings through the physical and mental release of concentrating on the body and on creative activities:

*'It is the most de-stressing thing I do.'*

*'What I like about it is that we're here to dance and not talk. That's really helpful in reducing stress.'*

*'I concentrate on the class so manage to forget all the issues/worries I might have arrived with.'*

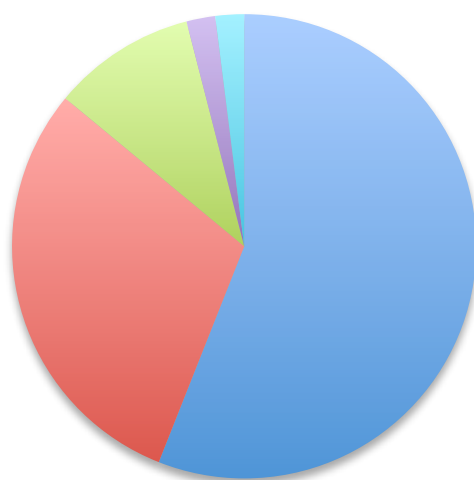
*'It makes me feel less nervous or anxious.'*

*'Coming to a session helps me to let go.'*

*'Dance for me brings together body, mind and soul, and gives me an intense sense of living in the moment. The experience of cancer has made me keenly aware of the need to savour and make the most of as many moments as I can.'*

In the surveys circulated in Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019, participants were asked: 'How far does *Move Dance Feel* affect any feelings of stress and anxiety you might experience? (where 1 is no change in such feelings and 5 is an **extremely positive and alleviating change** in such feelings)' – with **86%** of participants answering 4 or 5 to the question across these two terms.

### How far does Move Dance Feel affect any feelings of stress and anxiety you might experience?



■ 5 'an extremely positive and alleviating change' (56%)

■ 4 (30%)

■ 3 (10%)

■ 2 (2%)

■ 1 'no change in such feelings' (2%)

## 4.5 Body Image

Cancer treatment can cause significant shifts in the body more or less directly related to treatment, and resultant 'body image disturbance' is a challenge that many people face in recovery (Bahrami et al. 2017). The evaluation found that *Move Dance Feel* has had a significant impact on participants' sense of body image.

*'Cancer really affects your sense of confidence and your body image. The class restores that sense of body confidence. It makes you less angry at your body.'*

The evaluation tracked individuals' perceptions of their body image across the three terms, asking respondents to record how they felt about their body image. We found that **44%** of participants showed an **improvement in the perception of their body image**, for example:

**Summer 2018:** *'Overall positive, but also an awareness that some part of me is different - less energetic.'*

**Autumn 2018:** *Growing acceptance of the changes brought about through illness and ageing, and a greater sense of appreciation of the positive.'*

**Spring 2019:** *'Very positive and accepting of changes that have occurred as a result of surgery etc.'*



It was interesting that these positive shifts were often not about viewing one's body as 'improved' or 'restored' but rather about discovering new ways of perceiving and appreciating one's body. For instance, a number of participants spoke of their body image in increasingly practical terms: they had come to redefine the notion of this 'image' not just in terms of what the body *looks like* but what it can *do*.

*'It's OK - I feel strong when I'm running well.'*

*'I'm feeling overweight, but happy I'm more energised and flexible.'*

*'I am happy and lucky to be alive. My body feels much different from operations and treatment but I have slowly adapted and learnt to deal with the changes...'*

In this vein, in the Summer 2018 survey one participant responded to the question about body image with:

*'I feel that I am a bit lumpy around my stomach/abdominal area, I'd like to change this.'*

The following term this participant answered this same question with:

*'I feel better about my body after a dance class, feeling that it still works despite having 'let me down' by having cancer, and I'm more in touch with the component parts of my body.'*

As one participant notes below, negative body image can have a significant impact on numerous domains of an individual's life, and so the positive impact of *Move Dance Feel* thus 'rippled outwards' to great effect:

*'Cancer means your body needs focus and attention. You have to focus on yourself. Dance puts you back in touch with yourself and with your body again. But of course body image is a process. From where I was year ago until now is huge. I can't be bothered with my prosthetic now. I just can't. And that's a reckoning for me. It's a process of feeling positive. I started Move Dance Feel about a year ago and I also go to the gym now. And the next big step will be the swimming pool. It's about building up your own mentality and getting positive reinforcement.'*

## **4.6 Energy and Fatigue**

The long-term impact of cancer on energy levels has been subject to increasing study, with research highlighting the significant reduction in energy levels suffered by many living with or beyond cancer (Macmillan 2013). Furthermore, studies have also indicated the severe impact of fatigue on quality of life for those undergoing treatment or recovering from cancer (Curt 2000, Prue et. al. 2006).

*Move Dance Feel* participants have informally commented on major improvements in their energy and fatigue levels, which they attribute to the sessions:

*'It gives you more energy - I come feeling tired and I leave feeling like I have more energy.'*

*'I feel physically like I have more energy now.'*

*'Before I came to this class I had just stopped. I walked and talked and breathed. And I ate a lot of junk food. But I had stopped. And this group has turned everything around. It's made me active in so many ways. I'm so busy now! I've gone from fatigue to exhaustion, but they are very different! It's given me more of a purpose.'*

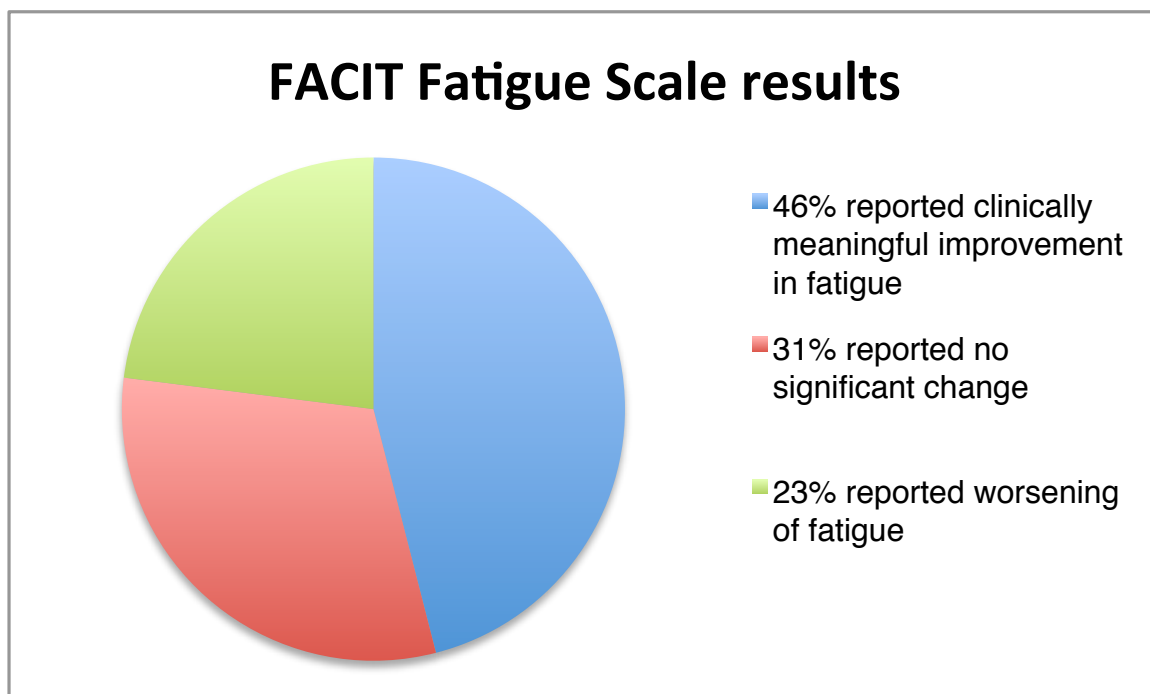
We were keen to use a more formal measure to assess whether fatigue levels were improving among attendees and so asked *Move Dance Feel* participants to complete the FACIT Fatigue Scale (version 4) in each of the three termly surveys circulated.



The FACIT Fatigue Scale is a short, 13-item tool that measures an individual's level of fatigue during their usual daily activities over the past week. The level of fatigue is measured on a four point Likert scale (4 = not at all fatigued to 0 = very much fatigued) (Webster et al., 2003). A change of 3 or more points is considered clinically meaningful.

**46%** of participants reported a clinically meaningful improvement in their fatigue; **31%** of participants reported no significant change and **23%** of participants reported a worsening of fatigue.

It should be noted that among the participants who did experience an improvement in their fatigue, 58% of these participants reported a **significantly improved experience of fatigue** (an improvement of 8 or more points.)



## 4.7 Getting Moving

In asking participants about the impact of sessions on fatigue, we noted an additional outcome in terms of participants going on to pursue other forms of exercise. *Move Dance Feel* acted for some as a ‘gateway’ to other forms of physical activity – having attended the sessions, participants now felt energised and inspired to get moving in other ways as well.

We discovered this was partly because of the ‘freedom of movement’ encouraged during the sessions that let participants discover what they were capable of:

*‘If you go to the gym it’s quite prescribed, whereas here we move everything, in every direction. I’ve not moved my body like this for years. There is a freedom – it’s like being in water. You move everything, everywhere. And I never feel bad the next day.’*

In turn, this freedom to explore one’s capacities found participants discovering a renewed strength and enthusiasm for exercise:

*‘My life’s been turned upside down... My family have been so supportive but the old ‘me’ got lost. And she came back to life today. You feel so good when you come here. This Christmas I bought a treadmill. A treadmill! Anyone who knows me would be so surprised. But it’s from coming here. My confidence has gone up so much.’*



## 4.8 Impact on Family and Friends

An unexpected outcome of the project was the impact that attending had on participants' family and friends. This theme only emerged during the focus group discussions, so a new question was subsequently added to the final survey issued, yielding a number of rich and heartfelt responses:

*'My family notice when I've been here – I'm more playful, more present, more loving. Because people are loving here. – Thank you.'*

*'I feel like other people can tell when I've been here because it has such an effect on who I am. I am less stressed and angry.'*

*'They know how much it means to me and notice a positive response.'*

*'I'm more resilient, I'm better able to cope with what's thrown at me, and especially able to support my family and partner. At the moment, some of them have run out of coping, but I haven't currently. I wonder if it's because of Move Dance Feel.'*



## 5. Key Findings

- Participants joined the project for a range of reasons including: a '**positive distraction**'; somewhere to be **active with suitable support**; somewhere to **combine exercise with creative expression**; and to be part of a **supportive group** with others **facing similar challenges**.
- Participants reported a **rich spectrum of well-being enhancement** through their attendance which respondents voiced as lying across four dimensions: **Positive Emotion, Connection, Self-Expression/Creativity** and **Accomplishment**.
  - Participants spoke of a wealth of 'positive emotion' from **joy** to **comfort**, often conjured by a sense of **release** and 'being lost in the moment' through dance.
  - Participants often talked about **connection** - of 'making connections both with myself and others' including **reconnecting with one's body** and finding '**quiet solidarity**' in a '**safe shared space**' where the challenges of cancer were collectively understood but did not necessarily need to be voiced.
  - Responses highlighted how cancer treatment often depleted individuals' creative energy. In turn, participants **highly valued sessions' creative nature** and the **restorative, invigorating** and **humanising** effect of expressing oneself creatively through dance.
  - Many participants spoke of a sense of **accomplishment** from participating, which often arose from a sense of artistic challenge in sessions. In turn, coping with these creative challenges in sessions has **empowered** some participants to **overcome challenges in other domains of their lives** to great effect.
  - The **high quality of creative leadership** from the project's practitioners was also highlighted by many as crucial to these outcomes.
- The evaluation measured subjective well-being with the 'Flourishing Scale' (Diener 2009). **42%** of participants recorded a **meaningful increase** in scores across the year and **54%** of participants **remained at a stable score** across the year.
- Participants reported that **attendance had a profound impact on their stress and anxiety**: '*It is the most de-stressing thing I do,*' commented one respondent. When asked 'How far does *Move Dance Feel* affect any feelings of stress and anxiety you might experience? (where 1 is no change in such feelings and 5 is an extremely positive and alleviating change in such feelings)', **86% of participants answered 4 or 5**.
- Participants emphasised the negative impact of 'body image disturbance' through cancer treatment. *Move Dance Feel* has a significant **positive impact** on participants' sense of body image: surveys found that **44%** of participants showed an **improvement in the perception of their body image** across the year. However, these positive shifts were often not about viewing one's body as 'improved' or 'restored' but rather about **discovering new ways of perceiving and appreciating one's body**.
- Participants have stressed the **significant impact** of *Move Dance Feel* on their **fatigue and energy levels**: '*I come feeling tired and I leave feeling like I have more energy.*' Results from the FACIT Fatigue Scale (version 4) found that **46% of participants reported a clinically meaningful improvement in their fatigue**. Furthermore, among these participants who experienced an improvement, **58%** reported a **significantly improved experience of fatigue** (of 8 points or more).

- A number of participants reported that these shifts in energy levels through *Move Dance Feel* had since encouraged them to **pursue other forms of exercise**: *'This Christmas I bought a treadmill. A treadmill! Anyone who knows me would be so surprised. But it's from coming here.'*
- An unexpected outcome of the project was the profound impact attending had on many participants' **family and friends**: *'My family notice when I've been here – I'm more playful, more present, more loving.'*





### **Watch *Move Dance Feel***

A short documentary about the project is available at: <https://vimeo.com/327721229>

### **Thank You**

With a very special thank you to the women of *Move Dance Feel* for taking part in this study, and for sharing their experiences. In addition, Emily Jenkins would like to thank the other *Move Dance Feel* artists for their invaluable contributions – Louise Klarnett, Naomi Welford and Hannah Wood – as well as all the staff at Macmillan Social Prescribing, Maggie's Barts and Paul's Cancer Support Centre.



## 6. Bibliography

Aspinwall, L. and Standinger, U.M. (2003). *Towards a Psychology of Human Strengths*. Washington DC: APA Books.

Bahrami, M, Mohamadirizi, M., Mohamadirizi, S., Hosseini, S., (2017) 'Evaluation of body image in cancer patients and its association with clinical variables.' *J Educ Health Promot*. 4: 6-81.

Curt, G.A., Breitbart, W., Cella, D., Groopman, J.E., Horning, S.J., Johnson, D.H., Miaskowski, C., Scherr S.L., Portenoy R.K., Vogelzang N.J.. (2000) 'Impact of cancer-related fatigue on the lives of patients: new findings from the Fatigue Coalition.' *Oncologist* 5(5): 353-60.

Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). 'New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings.' *Social Indicators Research*. 39: 247-266.

Macmillan Cancer Support (2013) *Throwing light on the consequences of cancer and its treatment*. London.

Peterson, C. and Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Washington, D.C.: APA Press.

Prue, G., Rankin, J., Allen, J., Gracey, J., Cramp, F. (2006) 'Cancer-related fatigue: A critical appraisal.' *European Journal of Cancer* 42: 846–863.

Seligman, M. (2011) *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being – and How to Achieve Them*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Webster, K., Cella, D., and Yost, K., (2003) 'The Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy (FACIT) Measurement System: properties, applications, and interpretation.' *Health Qual Life Outcomes*. 1:79.