

A group of 12 older people has been meeting weekly at Brinsley Parish Hall, Eastwood, Nottingham since June 2009 for dance and exercise classes. These sessions are facilitated by Dance4, Nottingham's internationally recognised experimental dance organisation.

The Participants



Edna Fisher is 80 and a former secretary. She hadn't had much contact with the arts until her granddaughter brought a leaflet home about the Dance4 dance class and her daughter persuaded her to do it. Edna suffers from arthritis and previous attempts at exercise had not been successful:

"My doctor gave me a referral for exercises at the local swimming bath, but I found that it was too much. It was all very 'gung ho'. They say to you 'stop when you've done enough' – but everybody is going like mad and you don't want to be the odd one out. It got so bad that when I was trying to walk back to the car, I could hardly walk, so I dropped that. Then this came along and I thought I would give it a try. And I'm thoroughly enjoying it."

Expectations and Reality

The sessions were what she expected and she has been going since it started in June 2009:

"It was how I thought it would be – I didn't think it would be dancing but exercise to music, which is really helpful. Without music you haven't got the same incentive to move. The two ladies that have taken the class have been very encouraging and they do understand when you can't move and when you can't do that bit. They do seem to say to you 'just do as much as you can' which I find quite helpful."

Enjoyment through engagement

"I've enjoyed it very much. It's a good crowd of people, we have a laugh and I've enjoyed the exercises. I suffer from arthritis quite badly and sometimes when I turn up I think, oh dear, I really can't be bothered. But when I go away I feel so much better, it seems to loosen things up..."

"We have a good laugh. If one of us can't do it, we all have a good laugh. Nobody laughs at somebody, we all laugh together and that is a great help."

Evaluating the impact of participating

"Doing the class makes me feel happy. I enjoy the whole session and when you walk in everybody says 'hello, how are you'? And it makes you feel better when everybody greets you with smiling faces..."

"It's inspiring and very enjoyable. I look forwards to Mondays coming round. Some mornings I wake up and I think – oh dear I do ache today, shall I bother going? Then I think – no pull yourself together and go. And then I am just so glad that I turned up. I feel so much better afterwards, when I go back home. I've really enjoyed it."



Muriel Betts is 74. Her husband died last year and a friend introduced her to the dance class. She didn't know what to expect at her first session and was pleased that it was routines to music. There have been positive benefits for her health, including exercise for a broken wrist.

Enjoyment through engagement

"I enjoy standing routines and arm and leg exercises and the warm ups and the relaxing bit at the end, because that is stretches. Usually when I go away I feel that I have benefited."

"I don't like it when we get together in pairs. I've got no imagination whatsoever. As soon as she (the facilitator) says 'think something up' my mind goes blank. But usually when we pair up, the other person feels the same and we just get on with it."

"The main difficulties for a lot of the ladies is remembering. We can do a routine and two minutes later it's gone. She'll say 'can you remember that' and we'll say no. But as long as there is someone in front of us to follow then it is fine. I do enjoy doing the routines. There is a very friendly atmosphere and it is a lovely group, there's a social aspect as well as physical and that is very important."

Evaluating the impact of participating

Muriel has been on two trips with the group – one to a performance at Dance4's cutting edge dance festival, 'nottdance', and another to see a Cuban dance group at Nottingham Playhouse. She found both performances inspiring, and says she would not have attended unless she had been part of Young@Heart:

"Going on the trips is a little bit of an eye opener because our age group didn't really do that sort of thing. The dancers are all youngsters and I do admire their energy and the work that they put into it. This last one was brilliant - the Cuban dancers. They just did so much and they just remembered it all and it was wonderful. I just said to Karla (the group facilitator) – I hope you aren't expecting us to do that when we get back!"

"I don't think I would have booked up to see it on my own. Likewise with nottdance - when the performance first started I thought - I don't like this much - but

when we got into it, it was fantastic – their facial expressions and their movements. It really told a story and I did enjoy it.”

For both these participants the health benefits of attending the classes have been inestimable:

“Usually I go back home and I’m raring to go. I do feel better for it. Energised. Not tired out, but the opposite. I’m very grateful for it. There are some times when I think I just don’t want to do that today. But I am always glad that I have because I feel so much better when I go away.”