

# Dance Companions Pilot Research Activities

## Final Report and Recommendations for Pavilion Dance South West

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### Introduction

The Dance Companions pilot was inspired by the Cultural Companions scheme managed by the Culture Office in Helsinki which provides volunteers (cultural companions) to accompany individuals to a cultural event or venue who otherwise find it difficult or who would prefer not to visit alone.

The Dance Companions pilot aimed to explore, through desk research and small scale pilot activities, the potential to develop a Dance Companions scheme to engage greater numbers of older people in existing dance activities, as audiences or participants, in targeted locations in the South West. 'Dance' in this context includes commercial dance activity, social dance, dance in cinemas as well as participatory dance activity and subsidised performance.

Two sites were chosen – South Gloucestershire and Plymouth – based on PDSW's existing knowledge and contacts in these areas, a desire to pilot in different types of geographical area, synergy with locally based organisations' objectives and local partners' willingness to contribute some match funding to the pilot.

The research began with desk research around similar programmes in other regions including:

- Manchester Cultural Champions programme
- Finland Art & Cultural Companions
- Kirklees Culture Club, Scotland
- Art & Opportunity Culture Companions programme, Belfast

This research explored each scheme's purpose, aims and 'offer', the structure and organisation of each scheme and their partners. A decision was made to proceed using the Cultural Companions model which focussed on linking up:

- Venues / dance classes
- Volunteer companions
- Participants (older people age 50 or over)

## Overview of South Gloucestershire Pilot

Collaborators: South Glos Arts Team (Alison Catlin, Arts Development Officer)  
Age UK (Michelle Dent, Volunteering Manager)  
South Glos Adult Social Care (Sue Jaques, Adults Commissioning Manager)

Several face to face and telephone meetings were held with Alison Catlin with additional phone calls with Michelle Dent and Sue Jaques to inform the development of the pilot in South Glos during winter 2014/15. Due to pressures on funding and staff resources at South Gloucestershire Council, it was agreed that an action research approach would be taken to the pilot as opposed to launching a pilot scheme.

A decision was made to focus on participation due to the lack of theatre venues in the area to watch dance performance. Transport was identified as a big barrier for people in South Glos attending dance events/classes. Local partners were interested in how they might buddy up more active and able residents in Extra Care Homes with those were less able to attend classes/events. They were also interested in working with Age UK's volunteers.

A 2 stage process was agreed. The first stage focussed on research including:

- mapping provision in the area and interest from dance class providers in the scheme
- research with Age UK and Extra Care Homes around the potential of recruiting volunteers
- researching interest in the scheme with potential participants via Age UK and Extra Care Homes.

Assuming the outcomes of the research were positive, the pilot would then proceed to the action phase which would feature testing of the proposal via small scale activities.

### Findings of Class Provider Research

The mapping and research work was carried out by a Community Engagement Apprentice, Lauren Hatton, and focussed on dance classes suitable for over 50s in the commercial and not for profit sector. Of the 43 classes identified, the vast majority were privately run and the most common dance styles were ballroom/sequence dancing and line dancing with some folk and tea dances.

31 emails were sent and 10 telephone calls made to dance class providers. Of the telephone calls, 5 respondents were non-committal in terms of willingness to participate in the scheme, one responded an outright 'no', one expressed interest in the scheme and one had ceased trading.

Most providers failed to see the added value of the scheme and views expressed by them can be summed up in the following quotes:

"You don't need a partner to come along and dance at our classes"

"If people want to come along, they will. We have plenty of older people in our classes."

Class leaders were happy for South Glos to publicise their class and direct people to it but were not interested in providing subsidised places to companions. Lauren fed back that they were not interested in the bigger agenda, there was no buy-in to the wider social remit or purpose of the project. She also fed back that they saw their offer as 'dance classes' and didn't see a wider role in terms of social inclusion, etc.

They also concerned South Glos were going to tell them how to run their groups.

Lauren summed it up as ‘speaking different languages’ – there was no understanding of dance development from the providers or buy-in to the wider aims of the programme.

Lauren reported a ‘hunch’ that the groups might be cliquey and that they may not welcome more frail older people coming into the groups with companions at discounted rates. Given this, she felt strong buy-in and enthusiasm of the class leader was absolutely essential to making it work.

Lauren also spoke to a small sample of four older people at a coffee morning at a local church. Whilst this is not sufficient a sample to be significant, the feedback from all four was negative in terms of participating in the scheme. They did not attend dance classes currently and were not interested in attending them with or without the offer of a companion.

Based on the lack of buy-in by local dance providers and the absence of venues to watch dance, Alison requested that the pilot activity cease at the research stage as she did not feel there was a sufficiently ‘strong’ offer locally to support a pilot and that it would be very ‘process heavy’ with few tangible benefits. She was also concerned not to get people on board and then not be able to offer them anything.

## Outcomes

Alison expressed that the mapping exercise had been extremely useful alongside the knowledge from talking to local dance providers. It had also been a very helpful development process for Lauren and had helped her to better understand the landscape of South Glos in terms of arts development work.

The research process had also emphasised the need to find engaging activities for Extra Care Home residents who were more able. Alison stated that they will seek to link people up with existing dance provision going forwards, but on an ad hoc basis rather than via a scheme.

## Overview of Plymouth Pilot

In Plymouth, the Dance Companions pilot was delivered by Plymouth Dance as part of its Cultural Shifts programme funded through Grants for the Arts. This included a focus on dance and health including the ageing population. Plymouth Dance was keen to take a strategic approach to establishing Dance Companions, ensuring it was embedded in its partnerships in the city and in the development of its Tea Dance with a Twist project, a central part of the Cultural Shifts programme of work. Like Dance Companions, this project aims to improve the health and wellbeing of participants by encouraging dance participation and helping to combat isolation and loneliness in the ageing population of Plymouth. A major element of the Tea Dance with a Twist project is about working in partnership with other organisations and service providers in the city to improve visibility and knowledge of their offer to over 50s, aiming to improve their physical and mental health and social engagement, so there was a natural link between the two projects.

## Participant Consultation and Recruitment

The strategic approach meant it took longer than anticipated for any activity to get off the ground as the focus was on establishing relationships with key organisations and individuals. The timeline was extended but it still meant there was only a short 'window' of activity during March-April 2016.

This consultation process marked the start of the research activity and took place Feb – Apr 2016. This consultation took place with 93 people aged 50-98 years in the city via a range of organisations and groups and aimed to find out more about older people's experience of and attitudes to dance participation and watching, alongside barriers to dance participation and their needs and pain points around dance participation. A summary of the consultation responses can be found in Appendix 1.

The consultation was an effective vehicle for developing relationships with older people and different groups / organisations working with them the city. It helped to promote Dance Companions to potential participants, familiarise participants with the volunteers and identify participants to develop relationships with.

Through the consultation process, a strong relationship was forged with Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) via their Community Worker, Hazel Alexander, which could be utilised to support the development of Dance Companions, Tea Dance with a Twist and other older people's activities going forward.

The consultation took place with the following organisations or groups (number of respondents in listed on right). They targeted communities on accessible bus routes as part of the consultation.

Plympton Residents (Plymouth Community Homes (PCH))	11
Ron King House (PCH)	11
Belmont Court (PCH)	6
Tea and Toast (PCH)	14
Weston Mill (PCH)	2
St Elizabeth's Close (PCH)	11
Memory Matters (Age UK)	18
Memory Matters (Age UK)	6
HHDC Tap Class	10
St Aiden's Tea Dance	11
Family and friends	4

## Volunteer Training and Recruitment

16 volunteers were recruited via Plymouth University (students) and these were joined by two members of Plymouth Dance / Exim staff, Tammy and Hannah, and two Plymouth Dance volunteers, Lydia and Nathan. Volunteers were DBS checked and undertook training around the 'creative consultation' led by Encounter Arts. This was designed to help volunteers think differently about the consultation process and ways to engage people in it which were creative, non-invasive and fun. Unfortunately, due to holidays and exam / performance commitments, only Tammy and Hannah were able to participate in the actual consultation process and as

companions in the programme during the pilot period. They also led the day-to-day liaison with participants around organising trips to the BRB event and classes.

## The Dance Offer

Dance classes suitable for over 50's were mapped as part of the pilot and this information shared with [information to be supplied direct by Plymouth Dance about publicity, the classes offer discounts achieved and relationships with dance providers]. Ballroom dancing schools did not wish to take part as they were "packed to the brim" already, primarily with older people.

During the pilot period, there was a performance by Karla Shacklock at The House venue but this was not viewed as a good starting point for the activity due to its contemporary genre. Instead, a performance by Birmingham Royal Ballet at The Theatre Royal was used as a 'test bed' for the programme and reduced price tickets were sourced for the performance for participants. These were subsidised for participants by Plymouth Dance to enable them to attend for free. The visit was heavily co-ordinated by Plymouth Dance who liaised by telephone with every attendee and arranged their travel to the event – either by own car, bus or taxi.

Free travel was secured for participants from Plymouth City Bus and this will continue beyond the pilot period. Taxis were also offered to participants where required, but most who accessed the offer were able to either use the bus services or their own transport.

## Outcomes

The following targets were agreed with PDSW for the pilot:

- 100 conversations with people about the project (either as volunteers or participants)
- Approximately 30 'meet ups'
- Approximately 10 'meaningful relationships' between participant and companion

The outcomes achieved are as follows:

- 93 consultations took place
- 14 people were identified to form a more meaningful relationship with
- From this list, 6 people wanted a companion to attend a class with
- 12 people attended a performance of Birmingham Royal Ballet at The Theatre Royal (20 people should have attended but 8 of those who booked did not show up on the day)
- 5 people were accompanied to a dance class

From Plymouth Dance's perspective, the research activity which has taken place to underpin Dance Companions has informed a wider programme of work, helping Plymouth Dance to establish the needs of over 50s and to ensure future projects in this area are responsive to this community. The aim is to use the Tea Dances with a Twist which will take place during June, July and August to promote the Dance Companions programme and encourage take-up.

Relationships with several organisations have been developed via this project including Plymouth Community Homes, Plymouth Guild, Elder Tree Befriending Service, Age UK,

Memory Matters SW, The Duke of Cornwall Hotel, Plymouth Dementia Awareness Alliance and Plymouth City Bus [Plymouth Dance to finalise this list].

As detailed above, Plymouth Dance was also able to secure reduce priced tickets for BRB from The Theatre Royals' marketing department – a first for Plymouth Dance for any activity, and something they are hoping to build on in the future. Spin-off benefits of the project for Plymouth Dance have also included using learning from the consultation and the project to improve the marketing strategy for the Tea Dance project. The free travel on Plymouth's City Bus network secured via the pilot will also continue beyond the pilot's end.

## Learning

The following learning from the programme has been collated from interviews with the following individuals and via the consultation process feedback:

- June Gamble, Co-ordinating Producer, Plymouth Dance
- Claire Summers, Project Manager, Plymouth Dance
- Christine and Eva, Dance Companions participants, residents of Plymouth Community Homes sheltered housing in Plympton
- Hazel Alexander, Community Worker, Plymouth Community Homes
- Tammy and Hannah, Dance Companions co-ordinators and companions, Exim and Plymouth Dance
- Nathan and Lydia, Plymouth Dance volunteers (undertook consultation training)

## Attitudes to Dance Participation and Watching

➤ The main barriers to participating in dance were reported as:

- lack of money
- lack of transport or difficulty or unwillingness to travel on their own
- perceptions that you need to be slim, young and fit/full of vitality to dance – it's 'not for them'. Hazel Alexander of Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) reported this view is particularly entrenched with the older people she works with.
- health problems and the perception that you have to be fit to be able to participate in dance.
- others included that some had danced with their husbands and now they had died, they did not want to dance with someone else.
- amongst men, 'macho' attitudes predominate – they may have danced when they were younger to 'get a girl' but gave it up once they were married. Two did express a desire to get involved but one had had a very bad experience of going to salsa and being undermined because of his 'two left feet' and another wanted to go to ballet but was reticent because only women attended.
- for individuals with carers, the carers were often a challenge – they did not want to attend events, did not return phone calls, it was difficult to get hold of them.

- Musicals are very popular but those in the consultation and interviewed were also interested in a wide range of other performance including hip-hop and street dance, Irish dancing and Latin.
- Older people with mobility seemed to be the most enthusiastic about Dance Companions and the Tea Dance with a Twist project. Younger interviewees with mobility were less enthusiastic.

### Communication and Relationship with Companions

- Participants would prefer social event/s to meet up with companions so they can get to know them as part of a group – they would be unwilling to go to an event with a companion they had never met before. Most reported that they would feel uncomfortable in a one-on-one situation with a companion unless they knew them very well. They would prefer ‘group events’ with one or two companions.
- It is essential there is consistent liaison between the organiser and the participant. In this case, the two companions (Tammy and Hannah) undertook all liaison with older people directly by telephone which was time consuming but effective. A dedicated phone line would be helpful with one person responsible for all liaison – the ‘personal touch’ is essential. ***“You need the relationship with the person – they don’t trust people and they don’t feel safe. For things which are a little bit ‘out there’, it’s hard to get them to do things unless they really trust the person.....it’s all about building relationships.”*** Hazel Alexander, Plymouth Community Homes.
- The best way of promoting a project like this is through word of mouth – advocates like Hazel are essential and the more advocates there can be ‘on the ground’ the better. Some older people do use Facebook but not email or Twitter, leaflets have limited impact.
- The two participants interviewed preferred direct communication via email with the Dance Companions organisers rather than relying on their local rep who they said wasn’t very dynamic / organised. They were highly engaged, up for trying new things and enthusiastic to promote the project via sharing flyers, posters, etc. They like meeting new people via the events and see it as a way to connect with new and old faces as well as attending a cultural event. They are very open minded as to what they attend with the exception of anything with swearing. They are ideal advocates or champions for a Dance Companions scheme.
- Feedback from many is very clear that there are vast differences in the demographics and attitudes of ‘older people’ and they are frustrated when they are all put in the same group. 50 up is a wide age range encompassing those who were born in the 1960s right back to those born in the 1920s or even earlier. They cannot be treated as one age group – their cultural references and attitudes are very different. For example, the two participants interviewed, were put off by the idea of a ‘tea dance’ as they associated it with something their parents might have done, twinsets, etc. Their cultural references were Motown and Elvis Presley. The more fit and able in the age group, based on interviews with participants, are resistant to joining in activities where there may be much older people present or those with dementia. PCH reported that a scheme such as Dance Companions and the Tea Dance in particular, are more relevant for over 70s – “they are the over 50s of previous generations”. Few under the age of 75-80 have any interest in formalised partner dancing.

- Two of the younger trained volunteers interviewed (who were unable to take part in the Companions events due to other commitments) expressed their own reticence for one on one interaction with older people and said they would prefer to accompany a group. One expressed that her grandparent had had dementia and she found it difficult engaging with people with dementia as it brought back difficult memories.
- Recruiting the ‘right’ kind of volunteer is essential –although the volunteers and organisers were well liked, it was reported that they were young and not so confident and assertive and the project would have benefited from the leads being more socially confident and able to build a good rapport with the participants during the consultation process. Maturity and experience of community development or teaching work with this age group would be helpful.
- Volunteer companions need to be ‘up for anything’ when getting groups involved – eg at one Age UK session, Tammy and Hannah ended up having to get up and do a dance for the group.

### **Setting the Project Up**

- Projects like this take a great deal of time to set up – response times are very slow as most liaison has to be done by phone rather than email and in some cases by post. In some cases, some older people worked nights so were difficult to get hold of during the day (eg taxi drivers). Others had very busy social or family schedules and were hard to get in touch with.
- A key challenge of the project from Plymouth Community Homes point of view was the lack of lead-in time for the consultation and the BRB visit. Hazel would have liked to have gone along to more of the consultations to help ensure Plymouth Dance got the most out of them. There was very little time to promote the project, build trust in it and engage people in it – more people would have engaged if there had been a longer lead-in period.
- The consultation was hugely beneficial to Plymouth Community Homes and Plymouth Dance in terms of starting those conversations and the learning from them. Definitely a useful model to take forward as a precursor to setting up a Dance Companions programme.
- Finding an individual such as Hazel Alexander from Plymouth Community Homes who has a strong relationship ‘on the ground’ with older people and who is trusted and respected in the communities she works in is essential for promoting and gaining buy-in to programmes like this. It meant the organisers were able to make direct contact with target participants. This was a different situation to Age UK where all communication had to go via the Memory Matters Co-ordinator and there was no direct contact with individuals.
- When planning interventions such as eg the consultation, consult with those ‘on the ground’ around questions and how the consultation will be carried out and carry out a test with a small group first. Some of the older people found the devices and tools used in the consultation confusing and the process unnecessarily drawn out, they also didn’t understand some of the questions – they were too broad.
- Dance Companions would have benefited from being ‘communicated’ more distinctly from the tea dance strand as the two became confused for many.

- Whilst there was training in the consultation process, there was no training or advice around the role of a companion for the volunteers. They expressed that this would have been helpful for them. First Aid, health and safety and a code of conduct are essential areas to look at to ensure companions fully understand their role and responsibilities. They also need to be aware of which organisation's policies they are working under – Plymouth Dance, Plymouth Community Homes, the venue, etc.

## Recommendations

Whilst the learning about the operation of a Dance Companions scheme from the two pilots is limited due to the number of activity visits, there has been significant learning around the groundwork required to set up a scheme. One of the clearest recommendations is that a strategic approach, linking to grassroots relationships 'on the ground' and ensuring familiarity with communities is essential. This is not an initiative which can be set up with a few meetings, a telephone line, a directory of classes and a volunteer or two. There is a great deal of fear amongst this age group in terms of dance as well as misconceptions and practical barriers such as transport, health problems and a fear of the unknown. Based on the learning from the South Glos and Plymouth research activities, some key recommendations are summarised below.

### Recruitment of Participants and Building Relationships with Local Organisations

1. **IMPLEMENT A CONSULTATION EXERCISE:** The consultation exercise in Plymouth worked well as a way of developing relationships with older people's groups and workers in the city as well as finding out more about the needs of older people with regard to a scheme and building relationships with them. However, a longer lead-in is required between the consultation period and the activities to build on relationships on the ground, familiarise people with the activity and encourage them to attend.

Finding committed individuals in local organisations that are passionate about dance and its benefits is probably more important in terms of recruiting participants than linking up with a 'big name' organisation eg Age UK. In Plymouth, it was the passionate commitment of Hazel Alexander (who described dance as "saving my life" after she was diagnosed with cancer) which appeared to be more helpful than high profile organisations like Age UK who based on feedback, appeared more 'remote'.

2. **LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS CRITICAL :** Plymouth's recognition as the first UK 'dementia friendly' city has mobilised networks in the city and raised awareness about older people's issues amongst diverse groups including Plymouth City Buses and corporates. June Gamble at Plymouth Dance is clear that this recognition and the networks which have been created between older people's groups and other organisations has been absolutely critical in enabling Dance Companions and the Tea Dance with a Twist projects to be established. The organisational environment in Plymouth (as in many places) is highly political and being able to operate within this diplomatically and take a 'softly softly' approach, bringing organisations on board with your plans carefully is essential. Plymouth Dance were highly successful in this regard. Dance in Plymouth also has an existing ecosystem and infrastructure and this is also crucial - the research in South Glos demonstrates this is critical in securing buy-in from class providers.

3. **IDENTIFY LOCAL PROFESSIONALS WHO ARE MOTIVATED ADVOCATES:** Finding and recruiting individuals like Hazel Alexander is absolutely critical to a project's success. Her relationships with individuals and communities and her knowledge of the city were invaluable and could have been capitalised on further with a longer timeline. Individuals like her can play a critical role in identifying target participants, bringing them on board and even attending the first visit with them. They are hard to find today as the role of community worker has become rarer with funding cuts, but approaching community cafes, residents groups, community centres and neighbourhood offices is a good place to look for them. Without these individuals, it is difficult to see how any scheme could get off the ground. It is also important they are built into the planning of the activity and the scheme – Hazel, for example, had invaluable knowledge which could have benefited Plymouth Dance in the planning of their Tea Dance with a Twist activity.

4. **RECRUIT ACTIVE, MOTIVATED PARTICIPANTS AS ADVOCATES.** In my opinion, the Dance Champions model in Manchester could work very well in Plymouth. Older people who could act as community advocates seemed to 'bubble up' naturally and recruiting these individuals and offering them 'perks' such as backstage tours, membership of an exclusive group, etc, is a great way of enhancing their quality of life and bringing others in their networks on board. Eva and Christine who are 73 and in her 60s respectively would be ideal Champions. Word of mouth is far more effective than any other channel in recruiting participants. Familiarity and identifying with the communicator is even more important. A Dance Companions scheme underpinned by a Dance Champions initiative to support recruitment and encourage more investment from venues is probably the most effective way forward and a good model to take out to other communities.

5. **FAMILIARISE INDIVIDUALS WITH DANCE:** Fear of dance is high despite the fact that, of all artforms, it is the one in which the target group is most likely to have participated. This is connected with the images of dancers in the media and the perception of dance as being all about 'ballet' or young, thin, fit musical stars. Helping older people to see that dance is 'for them' is a crucial part of any scheme – this could be through eg a publicity campaign of glossy images of 'ordinary' people dancing displayed in empty shop windows, or through building links to inclusive dance groups. Many in this age group have medical issues or walk with sticks, etc, and cannot visualise how 'someone like them' could dance. Taking participants along to watch inclusive classes or community performances as a first step could help breakdown barriers to dancing. Fear of the unknown is also critical and sharing video footage of local classes so potential participants can see who is there, what they are wearing, their ages, how good they are, etc, could help counter this.

*"It's not that people don't want to engage in dance, they don't feel entitled to engage in dance."* Hazel Alexander, Plymouth Community Homes

## Recruiting the Volunteers

6. Finding a small group of committed volunteer companions is important. Students are of limited use due to the extent of their other commitments. It is also important that the volunteers show some maturity and can communicate confidently with older people and help create a fun experience. Training for volunteers in what is expected of them eg providing them with a code of conduct, supporting them on some 'dummy' visits along with practical information such as responsibilities around medical or first aid issues is essential. If the volunteers are to be working with groups or individuals with dementia or Parkinson's, training around this is essential. Plymouth Dance plans to start a volunteering initiative which could help underpin the scheme in

the future. In South Glos, their initial research with volunteers suggested many were already committed. The 'Gig Buddies' schemes which have been launched in Bristol and Plymouth and which match disabled people with volunteers who accompany them to gigs could be a useful partner and source of volunteers.

## The Offer

7. **THE VENUE OFFER:** Fear of the theatre is highly linked to historical class issues in the over 65s – eg Hazel Alexander reported that, of a group of 70 people who lived on an estate next to the Barbican Theatre in Plymouth, only 3 of them had ever attended the venue before her visit with them. A venue like the Barbican is more 'daunting' to this age group than The Theatre Royal where they may have attended pantomimes with their children or grand-children or musicals. Whilst some more adventurous older people like Eva and Christine are happy to go to The Barbican, most need a venue like The Theatre Royal as a gateway and need to be carefully 'led' to other venues.

Building momentum through at least bi-monthly invites to performances which are suitable is important, unless the scheme is going to focus only on dance participation. This is a challenge in a city the size of Plymouth. An attractive dance participation alongside a venue offer is therefore crucial alongside work on the ground to 'familiarise' participants with and demystify dance.

From an 'offer' point of view, Dance Companions would work best in larger cities with more theatres and a greater touring 'offer'. In this case, I would recommend recruitment is focussed on small geographical areas within the city to enable the quality and depth of relationships with local organisations, communities and individuals to be formed.

Group visits accompanied by someone local people already trust as well as Companions volunteers could help to breakdown barriers to attending particular venues.

Based on Plymouth's experience and feedback from older people, paying a contribution for tickets / entry is preferred to either free activities or donations (Plymouth residents interviewed expressed their dislike of the proposed Tea Dance with a Twist recommended donation model – either charge a fee or leave the donation up to the individual). It also helps ensure resources are not wasted as they were for the BRB performance. This was subsidised by Plymouth Dance to enable a free ticket offer but several people did not turn up on the day. People are more likely to turn up if they have paid a contribution.

8. **THE DANCE PARTICIPATION OFFER:** Ballroom dance schools are unlikely to come on board with a Dance Companions scheme as they already have large numbers of older people enrolled and are commercially focussed. The potential to bring on board other commercial dance schools varies between location – in Plymouth, it was reportedly possible but it was not in South Glos. The dance styles offered by many dance agencies for this age group such as tea dances, creative dance, contemporary dance are not universally attractive.

Carefully targeting dance activities to different customer segments of older people and their preferences is crucial.

In a social context, those under 70-75 are less likely to want to engage in more formal, structured, partner dancing than older age groups. For those in their 50s, 60s and early 70s freer, less formal dancing which does not require partners is likely to work better. This needs to be taken into account when branding an initiative a 'tea dance' as it may be off putting to younger age groups. For these groups a freer 'nightclub' style event might be more appealing.

## Participation of Venues

9. Based on research in Plymouth, smaller venues such as The House or The Barbican are more likely to come on board with ticket deals than larger theatres such as Theatre Royal Plymouth (TRP), who are only likely to offer tickets for their less popular shows eg BRB but not Billy Elliot. The shows that older people are most likely to want to attend in any numbers – musicals, for example – are the shows for which it is most difficult to obtain discounted tickets. Operating Dance Companions in an area such as South Glos without any local 'mainstream' theatre venues is not recommended. Exploiting relationships between the Dance Companions lead agency and touring dance companies as well as venues can be helping in negotiating offers.

## The Set Up of the Scheme

10. **ESTABLISH A GROUP BASED SCHEME INITIALLY.** Based on feedback, both participants and volunteers would feel far more comfortable being part of a group visit than one on one. Ideally this would involve someone as an organiser who the group already know and trust as well as any Companion volunteers.

11. **INVEST SUFFICIENT TIME AND RESOURCES TO LINK ACTIVITIES AND PARTICIPANTS:** This activity is ideally carried out in collaboration with someone like Hazel Alexander who has strong existing relationships with communities. If undertaken by eg a dance agency, it requires a dedicated person who can build relationships with older people, getting out of the office and getting to know them and who can provide consistent liaison. Few participants will self-direct to this activity so setting up a phone line and leaving people to their own devices to phone on the basis of eg a circulated info sheet, is not a productive way forward.

12. **CIRCULATE A DIARY AND DATABASE OF PEOPLE'S PREFERENCES TO ADVOCATES:** The consultation was helpful in identifying overall dance preferences, but this could be taken further and detailed information of the sorts of activities people would like to see or take part in collated through eg questionnaires. When provided to advocates 'on the ground' along with a diary of times, locations and cost of classes, this information can be used to help match older people up so they can go along to eg a line dancing class together – with or without a volunteer.

13. **TRANSPORT IS A MAJOR BARRIER TO PARTICIPATION:** If Dance Companions wishes to target more isolated or less independent older people, providing transport is essential. More active older people, may still have use of a car or be happy to go on buses if the show is a matinee. Taxis may need to be provided for evening performances where other transport cannot be arranged. Participants are unlikely to travel on their own so matching them up with volunteers or other people who live near them is essential. Operating Dance Companions outside fairly central areas of major urban conurbations is not feasible without a significant travel budget or sponsorship from eg a taxi company.

14. **PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY:** Plymouth Dance are clear that unless the corporate and older people's sector in Plymouth takes up the baton in terms of the tea dances and Dance Companions with funding to support their 'good intentions', the activities will not be able to continue.

Tea Dances with a Twist will take place at The Guildhall, Plymouth in June, July and August and these will be used to promote Dance Companions and the dance offer in the city, but the future beyond September will be dependent upon funding from partners. The learning from the Dance Companions research activity has been invaluable in underpinning Plymouth Dance's other work with older people and will be utilised in other projects going forward, regardless of funding for Dance Companions.

Sources of funding to support activity such as Dance Companions within the public sector are few and far between but one potential source is the social subscription model being implemented with GP surgeries which has funding attached to support activity.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

I would recommend that any future pilots or roll-out of Dance Companions in other locations combines elements of Manchester Dance Champions scheme, Helsinki's Cultural Companions scheme and the Kirklees Culture Club .

Use a Champions approach to help recruit participants by developing a motivated group of local older people as advocates who are given access to exclusive 'offers' and extras such as backstage tours, access to rehearsals, opening nights, etc. This approach can also be used to help secure more venue buy-in as venues can work these older people to develop their offers through consultation, etc.

Use the Kirklees model to focus more on organised group activities, breaking down initial barriers to attending dance activities or performances and developing relationships between Companions and individuals, brokered by local grassroots workers such as Hazel Alexander. This could include activities where people live eg in communal lounges, to help familiarise people and reduce fear.

Use a Companions type approach to share information on local activities and match-make people to activities and volunteers. One on one activities need to develop organically rather than being forced.

Undertake all activity within a strategic framework which focuses on building strong relationships with venues, local organisations, key local advocates and activities such as promoting different images of dancers in empty shops which challenge stereotypes and preconceptions.

## Appendix 1 - Plymouth Dance Consultation – Summary of Responses

### 1. Have you ever danced before?

Yes	70
No	22

### 2. If yes, what type(s) of dance did you take part in?

Ballet	12
Tap	18
Jazz	13
Swing	24
Ballroom	41
Social	37
None	12
Other	21

– included line dancing (popular), Latin, go-go dancer, sequence, modern, square dancing, disco, Irish dancing, barn dancing, hip-hop, street dance, sequence, Ceroc.

### 3. Did you / do you dance at dance classes, socially or both?

Dance classes	7
Socially	44
Both	26
Never danced	12

### 4. Who is your favourite dancer?

Misty Copeland – “she is a strong, muscular ballerina who shows a healthier body type which hopefully will encourage companies and young women to think about who can do ballet.”

Darcy Bussell x 3

Margot Fonteyn

Fred Astaire x 11

Gene Kelly x 4

Ginger Rogers x 2

Wayne Sleep

Michael Jackson

John Travolta

Ashley Banjo

Diversity

Strictly Come Dancing dancers

Anton du Bec x 2

Len Goodman

Brendan Cole

Husband!

### 5. Would you like to dance again? If yes, what type of dance would you like to do and where?

Yes	45
No	18
Maybe	18

Comments:

- I would like to have a go at dances that there are currently no classes for - polka, minuet, some historical dances because I like the music - there is a society in Plymouth that does this but I think they teach for performance not fun.
- Hip hop
- Ballroom

#### 6. What type of dancing do you like to watch?

Ballet	27
Tap	27
Jazz	15
Strictly	56
Ballroom	56
Swing	19
Contemporary	12
Musical Theatre	40
Hip hop	12
None	9
Other	11

– Irish, Dancing on Ice, Waltz, Argentinian Tango Tango, Modern/Break dance, Soul, Lyrical, Sequence, Show dancing

#### 7. What stops you from dancing?

Age	31
Health	41
Lack of money	6
Transport difficulties	13
No one to go with	7
Not confident enough	10
Feel I would look silly	8
Nothing	22

Comments:

- Back and hip problems
- Lack of adult classes, height and weight worries
- My health isn't perfect but I am confident - always used to start the dances at the dance hall.
- Not really anywhere to go in Plympton. I wouldn't like to go without my husband. Don't like to travel too far. Get embarrassed when I go wrong.
- Rely on carers
- Two left feet!
- Lack of time
- Not interested
- Work

#### 7. Would you like to go and watch dance? If yes, where would you prefer?

Theatre / live shows	62
Cinema	13

Television	45
None	8
Other	3

Comments:

- I used to spend a lot of time but can't manage through disability
- I know personally that dancing and the Plymouth dance community took me out of a very dark depression when my cancer treatments finished. Dancing has made me happy and frustrated when I can't do things very well and physically and mentally healthier. I have met so many people who would like to dance but who believe it is only something for the young and slender, If a wider group of ages and sizes are seen to be dancing at all levels from beginners to practitioners maybe more people will feel that they have the right to dance.
- I would like the opportunity to watch at the cinema or theatre but I cannot walk too far.
- Interested in contemporary dance but need to sit down and need a taxi.
- Danced at the Guildhall and Continental but don't hear about it anymore. Like live bands.
- Nice for something out of comfort zone to start with
- Willing to try anything, love Ballet.
- Would like a regular group set up in Ernesettle.
- Not enough in area for age group, travel problems.
- Nice to meet new people.
- Would like to do dance seated if there was a class and wasn't too far to travel.
- It's important for everyone to have the opportunity to dance.
- Too old, balance is off.
- Would go to the theatre to watch but need help with travel.
- Danced all my life.
- Love dancing.
- Always danced with my late husband – haven't wanted to dance without him.
- I like music and dance preferably live.

**8. Would you be interested in having a Dance Companion?**

Yes	14
No	34

Comments:

- "I won 3 adult hip hop lessons in a raffle but am very nervous about going so if someone is free to go with me that would be great!"

## Appendix 2 – Key Contacts

### Plymouth

Plymouth Dance will supply a final list of the organisations they developed relationships with under separate cover as the information was not available at the deadline of this report.

### South Glos

Alison Catlin	Public Arts & Cultural Events Co-ordinator South Glos Council	<a href="mailto:Alison.Catlin@southglos.gov.uk">Alison.Catlin@southglos.gov.uk</a>
Sue Jaques	Adults Commissioning Manager South Glos Council	<a href="mailto:Sue.Jaques@southglos.gov.uk">Sue.Jaques@southglos.gov.uk</a>
Lauren Hatton	Community Engagement Apprentice South Glos Council	<a href="mailto:Lauren.Hatton@southglos.gov.uk">Lauren.Hatton@southglos.gov.uk</a>
Michelle Dent	Volunteering Manager Age UK South Glos	<a href="mailto:michelle.dent@ageuksouthglos.gov.uk">michelle.dent@ageuksouthglos.gov.uk</a>

### **Appendix 3 – Plymouth Budget**

Supplied in pdf format under separate cover.