



Seafarers Evaluation

Final Report for Stopgap Dance Company

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Executive Summary

The three-year Seafarers Project was run by Stopgap Dance Company from 2015-19, with partners across Norfolk and Suffolk and funding from Spirit of 2012.

The aims of the project were to engage local disabled and non-disabled people in inclusive dance classes and performances, to provide high quality, specialised dance teacher training in inclusive dance and to change perceptions of disability. It aimed to leave a legacy of increased provision of high quality dance, increased levels of participation in dance, and especially inclusive dance and changed perception and aspiration.

The project:

- Engaged 118 participants
- In 11 groups across Norfolk and Suffolk, as well as 5 taster workshops in 2016
- Worked with 9 schools and dance companies
- Trained 12 teachers
- 33% of participants were aged 8 – 14, and 67% were 15-64.
- 64% of participants were female and 36% male.
- Participants were approximately half disabled and half non-disabled

Increasing Wellbeing and Confidence

- Participants' wellbeing rose during their involvement in the project
- Disabled participants, in particular, felt happier.
- Participants' confidence and aspirations improved during their involvement in the project, they feel able to do more things, they see themselves as dancers.
- The longer the involvement, the greater the rise in confidence. This points to the potential for even more increase in confidence for those who continue to be involved in inclusive dance.
- Teachers and other adults working with the groups gained in confidence, skills and raised their aspirations.

Gaining Skills and Opportunities

- Participants, teachers and other project staff gained a range of skills.
- Some participants experienced quite significant changes to their lives as a result as a result of the project.
- For many disabled participants, this was their first opportunity to try out dance.
- As a direct result of Seafarers, there are new inclusive dance classes running from Sept 2019 involving the Stopgap trained dance teachers
- Seafarers has identified and stimulated demand for inclusive dance in the region.
- While good news, this can only partially be met currently.



Changing Perceptions

- Disabled participants' perception of their own and others' potential increased.
- Non-disabled participants' perceptions of disabled people's potential changed a little though further work is needed.
- Differential levels of prior experience and perceptions at the start of the project affected change in perception and participant outcomes.
- There was a shift in perceptions of audiences, although most felt they already had positive views.
- Participant, teacher and audience perceptions of dance, and inclusive dance in particular, improved.

Developing Networks and Connections

- Within the region (Norfolk and Suffolk), there is an emerging network of dance teachers who support each other and can call on Stopgap expertise to maintain level and ambition of inclusive dance delivery.
- Partner organisations are connected into this network, however further steps should be taken to fully join up the dance teachers with potential support and performance opportunities.
- Stopgap developed their links within the region and nationally
- There is a need for follow up and further development work to embed the networks and ensure that dance participants and teachers locally have access to professional and personal development routes in the region.

Learning

The project produced learning around:

- How to deliver high quality work at a distance and in a networked way
- How to engage, enthuse and change perceptions of young and disabled participants through inclusive dance
- Challenges in evaluating and showing value of such work

All of this useful for other projects seeking to work in a similar way

Important elements for the success of delivery were

- High quality training for dance teachers, with follow up support to maintain learning, quality and challenge, space for reflection and creation of a network between them.
- High quality, well produced performances within a professional programme. This gave benefits in terms of audience perception change and participants' sense of the value and appreciation of their skills.
- Stopgap's ethos of inclusivity which goes beyond the dance into every part of their work. This meant that teachers and participants felt valued and important.

Important barriers

- Geography and transport were major influences on the project. This was an issue for Stopgap in being based away from the region, and for the teachers and participants within a region with poor transport infrastructure.
- Thoughtful pre-planning, and a responsive communication style were particularly important in overcoming these.

Conclusion

Overall, the Seafarers was a very successful project, meeting all its aims, and making a profound difference in the lives of participants, volunteers and dance teachers, and in the strength of the inclusive dance sector in the East of England.



Recommendations

To Stopgap Dance Company:

- Continue to produce work and projects in way which puts your inclusive and warm principles at the heart: this is what enthused and changed perceptions of participants, partners and teachers
- Continue to emphasise the role of excellence within performance and teaching: it is this which engaged and transformed experiences for participants, teachers and audiences
- Your staff and your style are your greatest assets, continue to keep them to the fore and on the ground for training, support and performance.
- Commit more time – ideally at a senior level – to embedding connections and developing legacy networks and partners for the work. These were started with Seafarers, but the full potential hasn't been realised and more work is needed to get the best from the project.
- Continue to develop and improve your commitment to evaluation so that you have the evidence needed to further develop and share practice and secure funding for new projects.
- Work with Ruth Melville Research to produce a way of sharing the findings from this report in a format which is fully accessible to project participants.

For future projects

- **Learn from the approach of Stopgap Dance Company – principles and quality of process and product are incredibly important in making work which fundamentally shifts perceptions and ambitions.**
- Set up is key: develop strong relationships with local partners who can support and ensure legacy of the project.
- Ensure you select the right dance teachers – with a commitment to inclusive dance, and a wish to be challenged and develop in their work.
- Ensure the training is clear and of high quality. Follow up training with communications, some ideally in person and in rehearsals, to secure embedding of the training and ethos in teachers' practice.
- Be clear with teachers about their role and the expectations on them. Suggestions for practical arrangements to support this – arising from learning from the project include:
 - Have easy communication e.g. a Whatsapp group linking project manager with teachers (frontline delivery staff) and another linking with school/partner staff.
 - Have a model 'what to do' or 'guidance' pack eg to establish dates and timescales from the start. This could be adaptable for each location/teacher, for example, project lead could develop a central pack and each could adapt to their location (dates/times, venue, arrangements, contacts etc). The guidance pack should include clear roles and responsibilities of who does what in the project – school, project manager, dance teacher etc.
- Consider location, venues and travel in terms of supporting broad participant attendance, e.g. through lift share systems etc.
- Schools are hard to engage with as partners due to wider priorities overriding dance, and also potential for participants not self-selecting for involvement.
- Effective communication with schools and to parents is vital and can be hard to achieve, consider devolving this to (local) dance teachers to make it more streamlined.
- Keeping expectations high is key to effecting change: Stopgap had high expectations for participants, this helped participants exceed their own expectations and often change their own aspirations for the future.
- Don't neglect the non-dance elements of the class which also lead to positive outcomes: participants enjoyed the social nature of the sessions and made friends, they enjoyed movement and feeling fitter, and expressing their emotions.



For future evaluations and funders

Evaluation was a challenge for a project like this, learning included

- The value of considering evaluation buy-in, capability and capacity of all stakeholders from the start – including providing training and adapting data gathering.
- The limitations of quantitative data gathering with some participant groups, in particular the fact that many of the nationally validated question scales were not at all appropriate for people with learning disabilities. There is a need to include other approaches which are appropriate and fit with a social model of disability. These are often the data gathering approaches which show outcomes most effectively.
- The value of reflective approaches for learning and reflection, as well as evaluation, for example, the teacher reflective journals were very popular with teachers and at least one is using this for her own practice too.
- The importance of continued support for evaluation – both in terms of supporting data collection and in continuity of approaches, and recognition of how this needed supporting across core staff changes
- Consideration of how the evaluation learning can be shared with participants in such a distributed project.



1. Introduction

This report examines the way that the three-year Seafarers project influenced the wellbeing, confidence, skills and opportunities available to people connected with it, and how it influenced their perceptions of dance, inclusive dance and of disability. It also looks at the project's influence on networking and communications for the people involved, and looks at project delivery, communications and the evaluation process itself.

1.1. About Stopgap

“Difference is our means and our method”

Stopgap Dance Company Website

The Stopgap Dance Company, based in Farnham Maltings are an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation who aim to create exhilarating dance productions for national and international touring., Stopgap employ disabled and non-disabled artists who collaborate on dance productions devised by the company dancers and collaborators, working as an ensemble under the artistic direction of Lucy Bennett. Stopgap say they ‘value a pioneering spirit and are committed to making discoveries about integrating disabled and non-disabled people through dance.’

“Our productions seek to offer a window into a parallel world where human interdependence, strength and vulnerability play out with poetic realism.”

Stopgap Dance Company Website

1.2. The Seafarers project

The Seafarers Project is a three-year project, with £210,000 funding from Spirit of 2012 to embed inclusive dance classes and performances in Norfolk and Suffolk. Stopgap worked with partners Norfolk & Norwich Festival, The Garage, DanceEast, as well as various local schools, to train dance teachers and to engage people in the area to participate. The funding also enabled them to perform two large-scale outdoor productions involving the participants from the classes. In May 2018, ‘The Seafarers’ was performed in Great Yarmouth as part of Norfolk & Norwich Festival. In May 2019 the groups performed a piece called Frippery outside the Forum in Norwich as part of the Without Walls Festival and the Norwich & Norfolk Festival.

The project's legacy was the provision of high quality, specialised dance teacher training teaching as well as increased levels of participation in dance, and especially inclusive dance.

The Seafarers celebrated our relationship with the sea and the journeys we make across it. Part gig, part spectacle, the 50-strong cast travelled to and from distant lands with a seafront as the backdrop.

The original production was commissioned and co-produced by Portsmouth Festivities in 2015 with support from Arts Council England and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Norfolk performances were supported by Norfolk & Norwich Festival. Project Partners included DanceEast and The Garage with support from Spirit of 2012 and D'Oyly Carte Foundation. The Free Outdoor Programme in Norfolk was supported by The Paul Bassham Charitable Trust and The Geoffrey Watling Charity.

Frippery was, and continues to be performed as, an outdoor piece where ‘a community cast of locals and professionals collide in a mass performance of the game Grandmother's Footsteps.

“Bizarre, playful and farcical this is a delightful parade not to be missed!”

Lucy Bennett, Stopgap Artistic Director



The project:

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- Worked with 9 schools and dance companies
- Trained 12 teachers
- 33% of participants were aged 8 – 14, and 67% were 15-64.
- 64% of participants were female and 36% male.
- Participants were approximately half disabled and half non-disabled

1.3. About the evaluation

The evaluation was designed as an embedded evaluation, with Ruth Melville Research supporting the project co-ordinator to develop and implement a framework which both met funder requirements for monitoring outcomes and also would help Stopgap to understand how the project was working and adapt accordingly. The learning didn't just come at the end, but was an iterative process enabling the project to develop and change.

The first stage of the evaluation was to develop a Story of Change (see [Appendix 3](#)) for the project, a way of setting out who the project aimed to affect, and how, taking into account funder requirements but also project partner aims. A Story of Change workshop was held in summer 2017 and the findings were developed into an evaluation framework setting out what data collection was required when, and from whom.

A mixed method approach was undertaken¹ including:

- Quantitative data from repeated wellbeing and perceptions scale tests and set questions;
- Reflective Journals completed by Dance Teachers
- Interviews with Stopgap Staff, Dance Teachers, School Teachers, Partners, Parents, Volunteers and Participants²
- Observations at Dance classes and performances
- Reflective sessions and conversations
- Audience questionnaires from the two main shows.

In keeping with Stopgap Dance Company's principles of inclusive approach, a good deal of work was done to ensure that data gathering was appropriate for all participants, while meeting the requirements of the main funder Spirit of 2012. Discussions were held with the funders and an adapted model for scoring both wellbeing and perception change was developed for younger and learning-disabled participants as the required (nationally benchmarked) tests were not accessible. It was a pity that we were not able to use the same tests for all participants in accordance with Stopgap's inclusive principles.

At the end of the project, due to a reorganisation of the evaluation time, there was an agreement that Ruth Melville Research carry out the analysis and writing up of the findings which are now included in this report.

¹ For full list of data collection see [Appendices 1 and 2](#)

² We greatly appreciate the time given to the evaluation by many people, particularly participants, volunteers and parents. Their viewpoints are particularly important as often forgotten and we have tried to represent them as much as possible. Some families of participants were easier to speak to than others, partly as it was the school holidays when the report was researched and partly as parents of participants were less available throughout the project. For this reason, we acknowledge that not all viewpoints of the project from parents and family members have been fully explored.



1.4. This report

This report is structured around the [Story of Change](#) outcomes and learning arising from the project, after Section 1, the introduction:

Section 2 explores the impact on participants' wellbeing: whether they are happier, more confident and with higher aspiration

Section 3 explores the impact on participants', dance teachers' and project staff and partners' skills and opportunities

Section 4 explores the way the project changed perceptions of disability, disabled dancers and inclusive dance among all project stakeholders

Section 5 explores the networks and connections developed

Section 6 looks at the operation of the project and learning arising from this

Section 7 sums up learning and outlines recommendations for Stopgap Dance Company and particularly for future projects working in this way.



2. Happier, more confident and aspirational participants

An increase in wellbeing and confidence were identified as two of the main outcomes for the Seafarers project, with a recognition that a change in confidence is a major step to people taking further action and thus gaining increased wellbeing. In this section, we explore the extent to which the Seafarers project achieved its aims of improving the wellbeing and confidence of participants in the project.

This work draws on a mix of qualitative data gathering from participants, dance teachers, volunteers and group organisers, as well as reflections from project staff, along with quantitative data gathered by dance teachers from project participants.

We find that:

- Participants' wellbeing rose during their involvement in the project: this is clear from both quantitative measures and qualitative feedback
- Although there were some differences in outcomes within and between different groups, there were no clear patterns, so this is likely to be down to differences within the participant group.
- Even for those who had very little involvement in the dancing, there were wellbeing outcomes arising from being peripherally involved
- Participants' confidence improved during their involvement in the project, they feel able to do more things, they see themselves as dancers.
- Even in the comparatively short timescale of the program, the longer the involvement, the greater the rise in confidence. This points to the potential for even more increase in confidence for those who continue to be involved in inclusive dance.

2.1. Overall wellbeing

Changes in wellbeing for participants were measured through repeated completion of one of two questionnaires completed at the beginning of term 1, and at the end of terms 1, 2 and 3 for each of Years 2 and 3 of the project.³ Both were based on nationally recognised scales used elsewhere.⁴

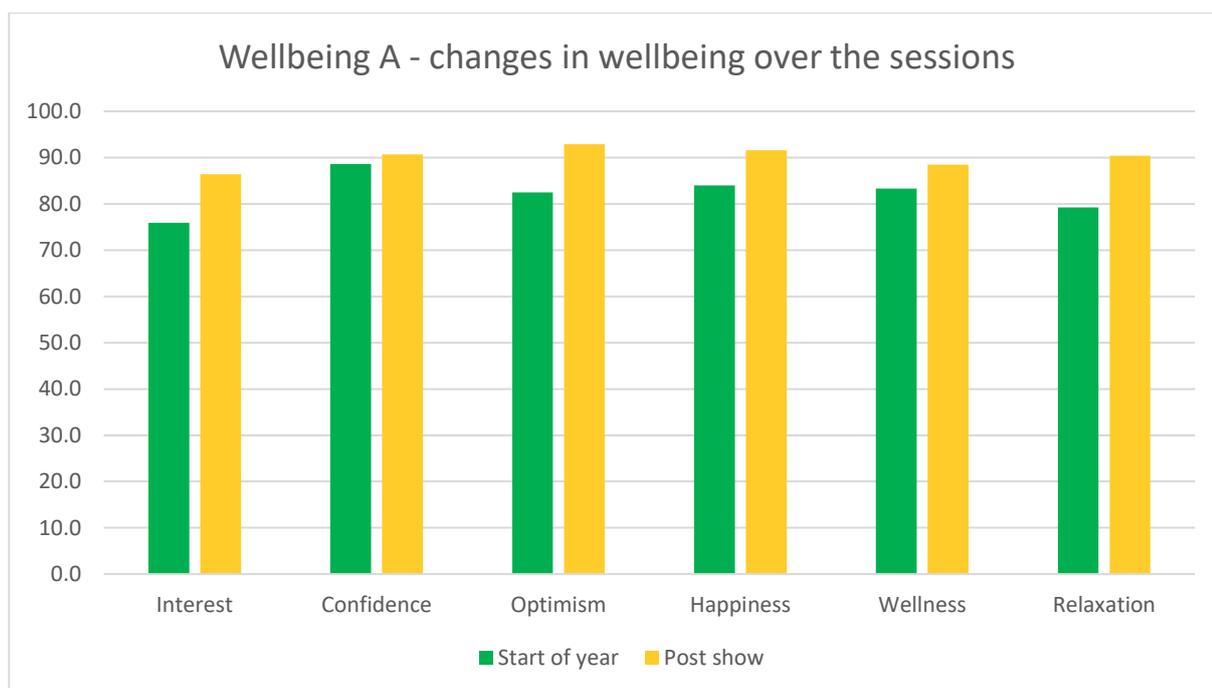
The areas covered included their levels of happiness, optimism, confidence, wellness, relaxation as well as whether people had friends in the class.

In addition, comments were collected through open questions, feedback was given by teachers and dance teachers and parents were asked for feedback in a questionnaire at the end of Year 2 and interviews at the end of Year 3.

Younger and learning-disabled participants (wellbeing A), increased their scores on every dimension of wellbeing between the start of the year and the end for both full years.

³ Year 1 was the year the project was set up and involved taster sessions, so no long-term changes could be tracked.

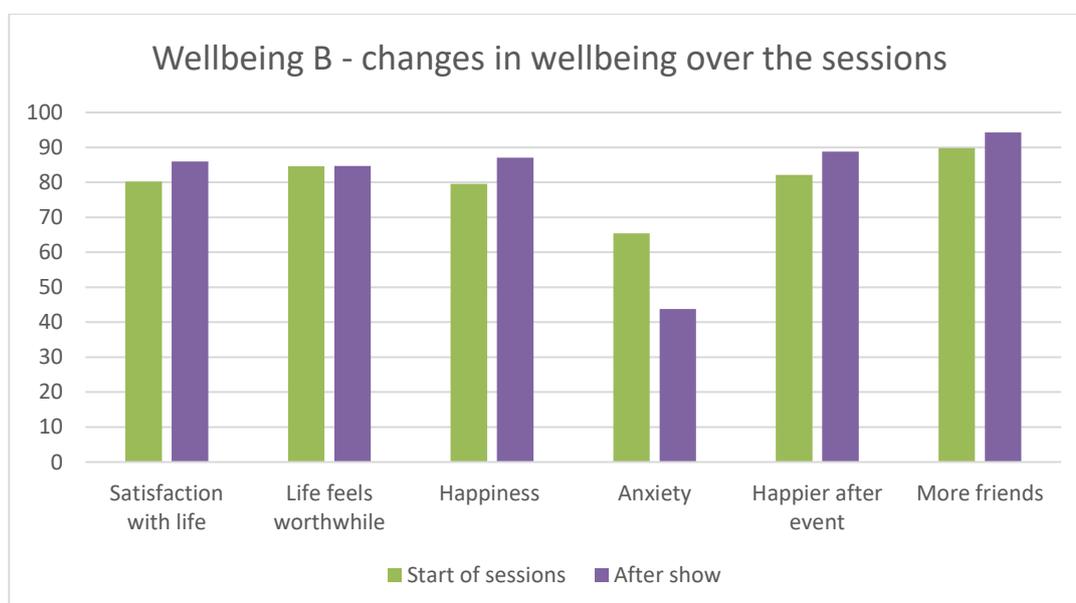
⁴ For older participants ONS wellbeing questions were used as per Spirit of 2012 guidelines, for younger participants and learning-disabled participants the Canterbury Wellbeing Scale, developed by Canterbury Christ Church University was used as more accessible. See [Appendix](#) for examples of both



Average scores for all areas of wellbeing were high, indicating that participants felt these strongly – for example, at the start of the year Wellbeing A participants reported feeling an average of 84% happiness before the session, and an average of 92% happiness afterwards. The ‘before the session’ figures for all the wellbeing measures were above 70% and all ending figures were over 80% (most over 90%).

Combined figures for the entire project showed a reported rise of 11% for feelings of being interested. Confidence rose by an average of 2% and the participants felt 8% more happy. There was a 10% rise in optimism, and participants felt an 5% increase in feeling well and felt an average of 11% more relaxed.

Older participants (wellbeing B) showed improvement on very nearly all dimensions for both full years.



Measured in a slightly different way, average scores for wellbeing here were also high and also showed positive change for most measures, with the majority of reported average scores above 7 for feeling satisfied with life, feeling that things in life are worthwhile, feeling happy, the event making them feel happier, and having friends in the group. The exception was the question ‘how anxious did you feel yesterday’, where the average score was 6.54 at the beginnings of sessions and 4.38 by the end.



Figures for the entire project showed a reported rise of 0% for feelings of being satisfied with life over the course of a session. Feelings of life feeling worthwhile remained the same on average. Feelings of happiness rose by an average of 8% over the sessions, and people felt 7% happier after the event. Feelings of anxiety fell by 22% on average. Respondents reported a rise in 5% of feeling that they had friends in the group.

There were some differences in outcome between Wellbeing A and Wellbeing B respondents, but overall both groups rose in all measures. This is a strong increase and shows being involved in the Seafarers project had a clear positive impact on the participants' wellbeing.

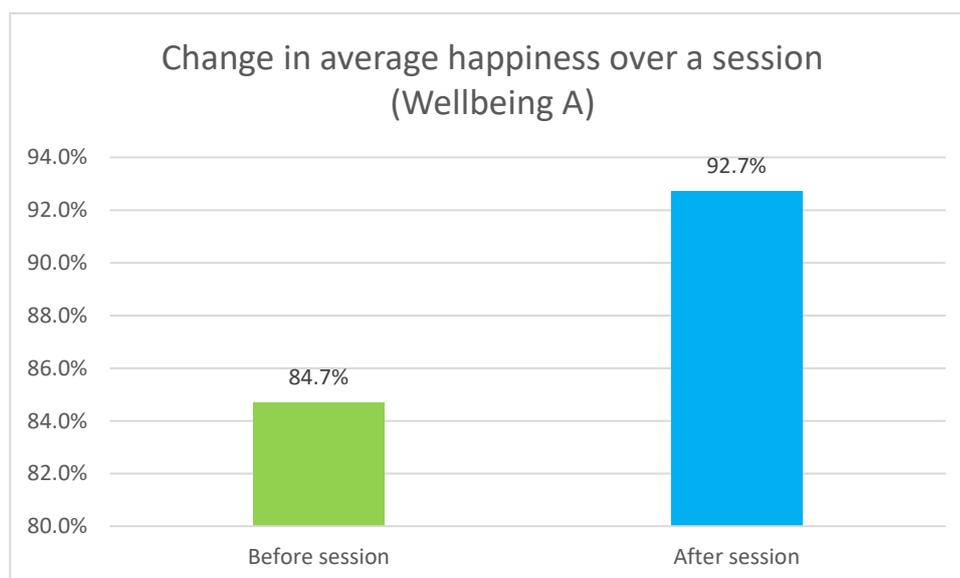
There were indications that some of the participants found the questions difficult to answer (see section on data below). Some sessions saw responses fall for a few individuals, and it would be interesting to have known more about why that was – although sometimes the teacher indicated that a child had another reason, such as not feeling well that day. Other participants scored all factors at maximum score both before and after the sessions, sometimes throughout the year, which may also have affected the figures.

2.2. Participants felt happier and had fun

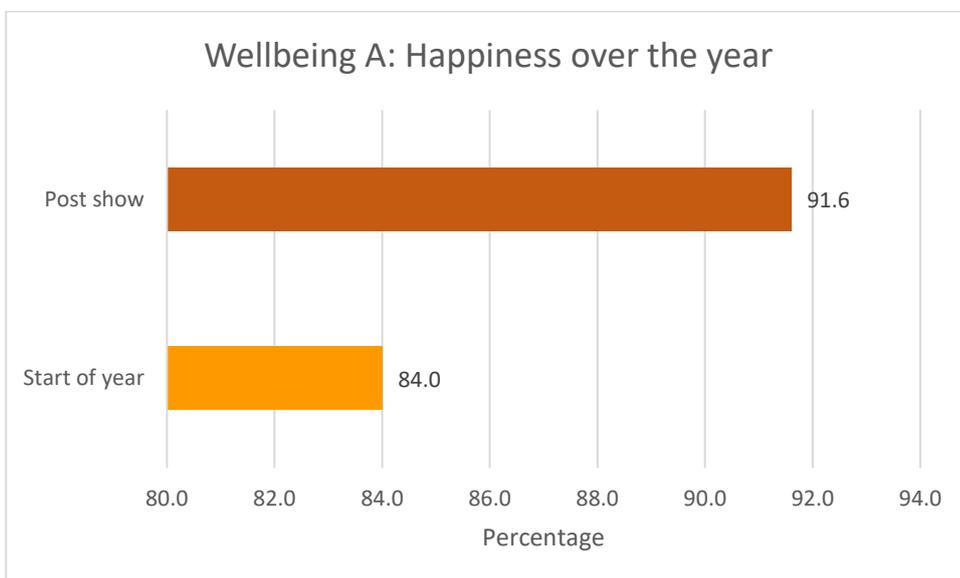
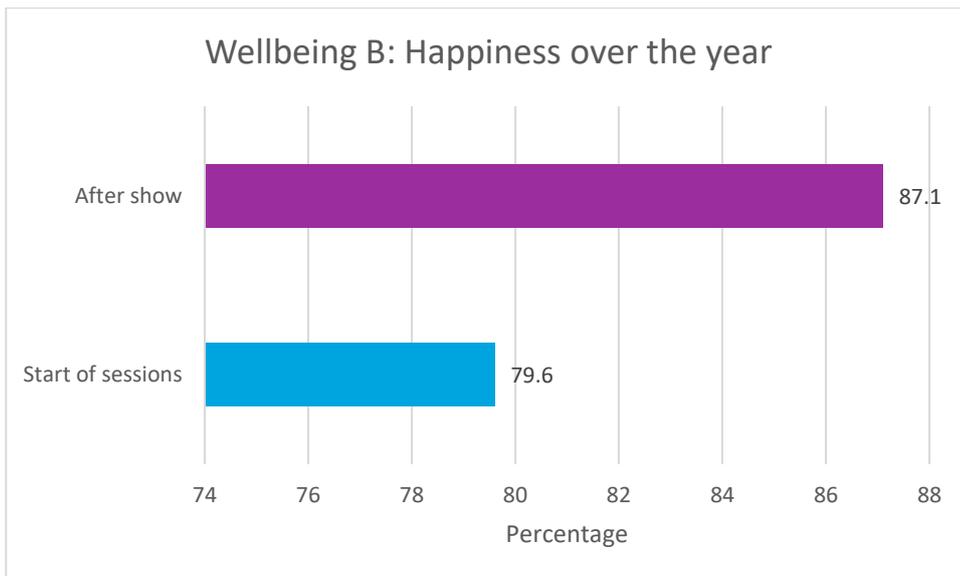
“One of our guys would literally stand at the door waiting for [the dance teachers] to arrive”

Ali Hagger, Operational Manager at Leading Lives

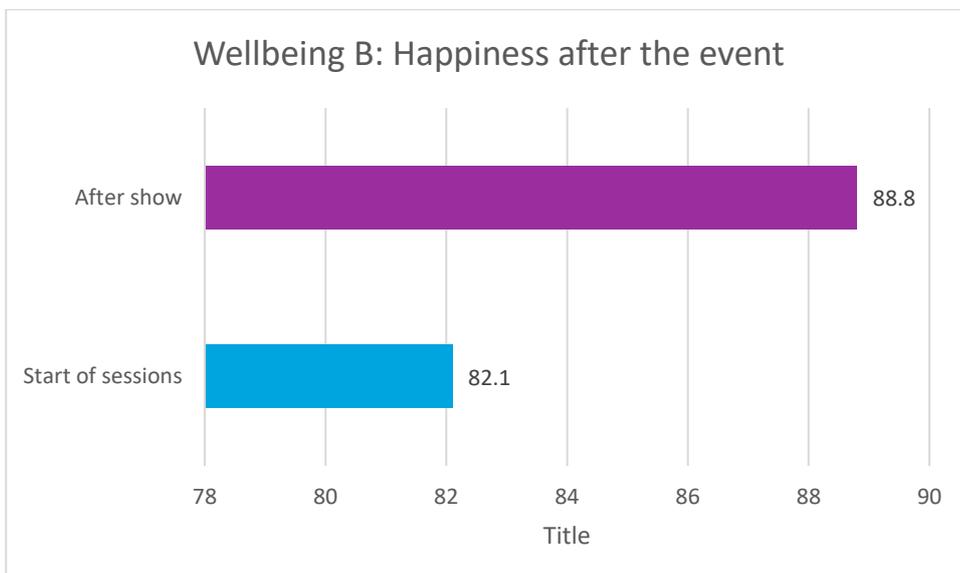
The data shows that participants happiness increased during one session (as opposed to over the year). For example, the average score rose from 77.1 to 90.1 out of 100 (data combined for Seafarers and Frippery) for these Wellbeing A respondents.



Over the course of the year, happiness levels also rose by 8% on average from the start of rehearsals to after the show itself for both Wellbeing A and Wellbeing B respondents.

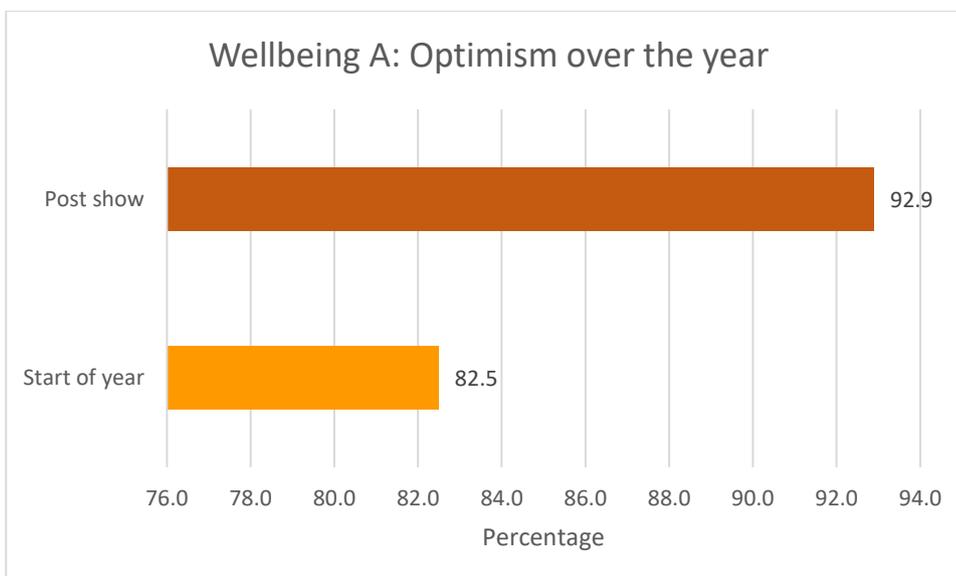
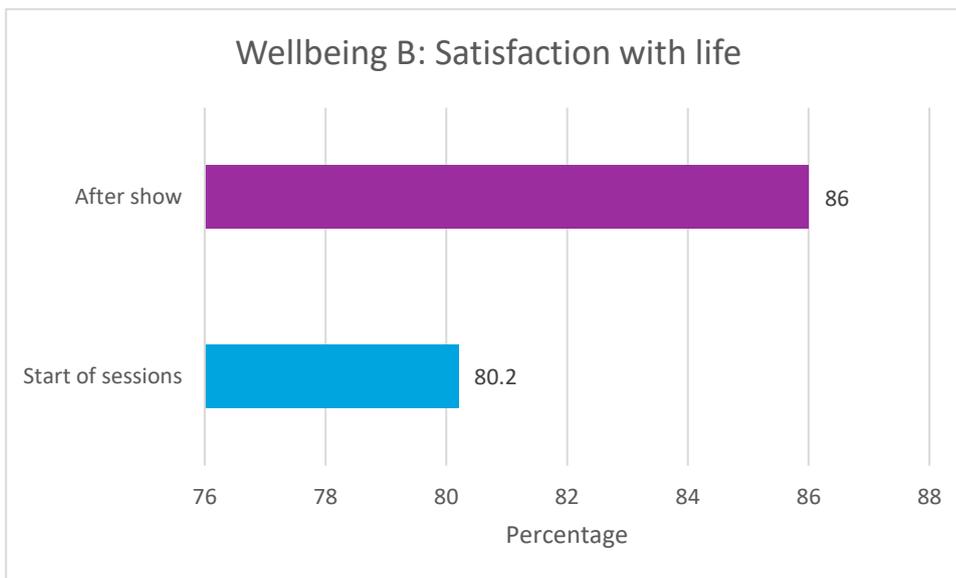


Wellbeing B participants also showed that participants scored 7% higher on ‘feeling happier yesterday’ over the course of the year.





People answering the Wellbeing B survey also felt 6% more satisfied with their lives in general, while people responding on Wellbeing A also showed a similar trend of feeling 8% more optimistic.



The participants' enjoyment of the sessions was reflected in comments they made directly afterwards and feedback from teachers and parents. The answers show impacts on happiness and fun. They enjoyed aspects of the session including the dance itself, being with others, the music and dancing with others.

"Music- exciting loud music!"

Participant, written comment on questionnaire

"I like dancing exercises, I like the flamingo dance for lord mayors, I like doing sign names, I like performances"

Participant, written comment on questionnaire

The parents' questionnaire from Year 2 also showed they felt that their child was happier as a result of the weekly dance class, giving this an average score of 4.5 out of 5.



“My son loves his weekly Stopgap dance classes so much! He is always so happy to tell us about what he has learnt. The teachers make it fun and enjoyable for him. The questions have not really given me the opportunity to say how much he enjoys it so I have put it in this section!”

Response on parent questionnaire from Year 2

“I wish he could continue to have regular dance classes as he has enjoyed it so much. For him to be able to perform in front of a large audience has been a fantastic achievement.”

Response on parent questionnaire from Year 2

Teaching staff observed that people taking all roles in the sessions, even if not dancing, enjoyed the sessions.

“Very enjoyable. They enjoyed being there even if weren’t always taking part; they enjoyed the experience of it.”

Finlay James, Stopgap apprentice dancer and teaching assistant

These participants still felt themselves to be fully ‘in’ the project and increased in feelings of wellbeing from it in the same way. Again, taking part in the rehearsals was as beneficial as taking part in the performance itself.

“As [this person] started gearing up for it, I think they suffered a little bit of anxiety about it. We tried – again, Anna was fantastic and the guys were fantastic in trying to show photos of the space that they’d be in and things like that but I think he just got a bit overwhelmed and decided not to do it....obviously, we support people with learning disabilities and autism, and he was saying ‘I’m not enjoying it, I’m not enjoying it’ – but I’ve watched clips of him in the practices and I’d pop in and see him, and he was loving it! It was just his way of going ‘I’m worried about this, I don’t want to do this.’...”

Now since the performance, we’ve seen the photos, we’ve looked at video in the group in the building here, and he talks about it as if he was involved in it, so it’s ‘that thing that I was part of’, so that’s good.”

Ali Hagger, Operational Manager at Leading Lives

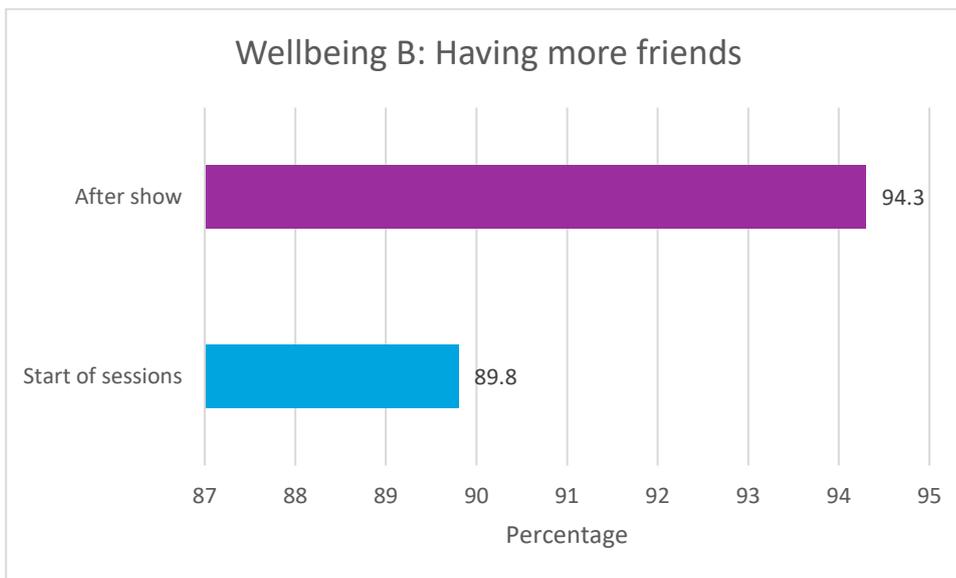
Audience members at the performance could tell how much participants were enjoying what they were doing:

“Fantastic to see the smiling faces of the performers and audience!”

Audience comment from questionnaire completed after Frippery.



2.3. Participants enjoyed social interaction and made friends



Participants did enjoy social interaction. Scoring of the statement 'I have friends in this group' was high on the Wellbeing B questionnaire and showed a rise of 5% over the years. Many expressed enjoyment of working with staff and other participants.

“[I like] duet work with Catherine [Stopgap volunteer] - she is amazing”

Participant, written comment on questionnaire

“Being a part of a team with others who enjoy it as well and using the heart whilst dancing”

Participant writing about what they like about dance sessions.

When asked about how their children had found the dance sessions, parents shared their positive views of social outcomes for participants.

“It’s a real social community, an amazing meeting point, and I think all her friends currently are the people she’s made through dancing.”

Parent of participant.



Enjoying dance together - Rachel and Natasha

Rachel smiles and points at Natasha; she's just been asked what she enjoyed about dancing at Seafarers. The two women come from Leading Lives, a day service for adults with learning disability, where Rachel works with Natasha, her one to one assistant.

“Me and Rachel have got a bit of a bond, haven't we, and we really enjoy dancing together!”

Natasha

Rachel has danced before in workshops at Leading Lives and also with Dance East and she loves doing it. Dancing helps Rachel feel better. When she first started to dance, she had a walking frame to help her balance, but by the end of the sessions she had really improved and didn't use the frame anymore. That was partly to do with how much she enjoyed herself.



“She wanted to join in and that was really noticeable – she really did look forward to the sessions and would talk about it afterwards when she came back the next day. Lots of clapping hands!”

Natasha

Dance teacher Anna Rowe, who worked with Rachel's group in her second year of teaching for Stopgap, remembers just how much Rachel improved.

“Progressively, she moved with more and more ease, more and more quickly, and by April she was running. And for her, everything about her opened! She lifted up her head to socialise with the others and really connected.”

Natasha talks about the people at the centre and says that not everyone gets to access activities out and about and that travel always an issue, so having something at their day centre that they could tap into was very worthwhile.

As Rachel's one to one, Natasha also took part in the dancing, so I ask her how it was for her and she laughs:

“On the day of the performance I was just buzzing. It was so lovely to see the response from the audience, and the looks on ... [the participants'] faces were just happy and so proud – I was really proud of them all. That was a huge thing to do in front of a crowd of people.”

All the participants at the centre clearly remember the Frippery project, and centre manager, Ali Hagger, tells me that they were really proud of themselves too. Back at the centre, everyone watched videos of the performance together and that feeling of pride and involvement kept going – they still talk about it now!

“More than anything, what I noticed with Rachel was her confidence. Literally, blossomed.”

Natasha



There was a definite sense that social interaction and communication was enabled by dance and through the sessions in a way that simple conversation could not. Sometimes, this was especially important for participants who were not able to communicate through speech easily.

“It’s a wonderful way to meet others who may have more difficulty through speech and language, I feel, to dance. It’s a wonderful way to share what’s happening between a group of people. [Participants] can express themselves through dance in a way they can’t through speech.”

Parents of participant

In interview, parents were also keen to emphasise that the benefits of Stopgap involvement often reached beyond the dance session and led to increases in social wellbeing for them at home, too.

“It’s something that comes home, it’s part of the conversation with other people, the pride in what you’re doing”

Parent of disabled participant.

“A. really enjoys dancing and likes performing. He also really enjoys getting to know all the stopgap dancers”

Teacher comment accompanying participant questionnaire

2.4. Participants enjoyed the movement and feeling more fit

Participants made many comments that show that movement was a key part of why they enjoyed the sessions. Dance teachers confirmed that they had loved the movement aspect of the sessions, and the games and moves involved.

“I like to do routines and copy movement.”

Participant comment on why they like dance

“[I like] how you move and take your body into the music.”

Participant comment on why they like dance

“Do the swimming movement, catching fish, whirling around and writing in the sand. Following the moves!”

Participant comment on why they like dance

There were also comments that showed participants enjoyed getting fitter.

“I like to express my emotions, to get fit, and face any challenges that face me, and to perform in front of an audience on the stage. I dream big.”

Participant written comment on wellbeing questionnaire.

“The improvement of flexibility and the music”

Participant describing what they liked about dance sessions

“Strengthen feet, make me happy”

Participant describing what they liked about dance sessions



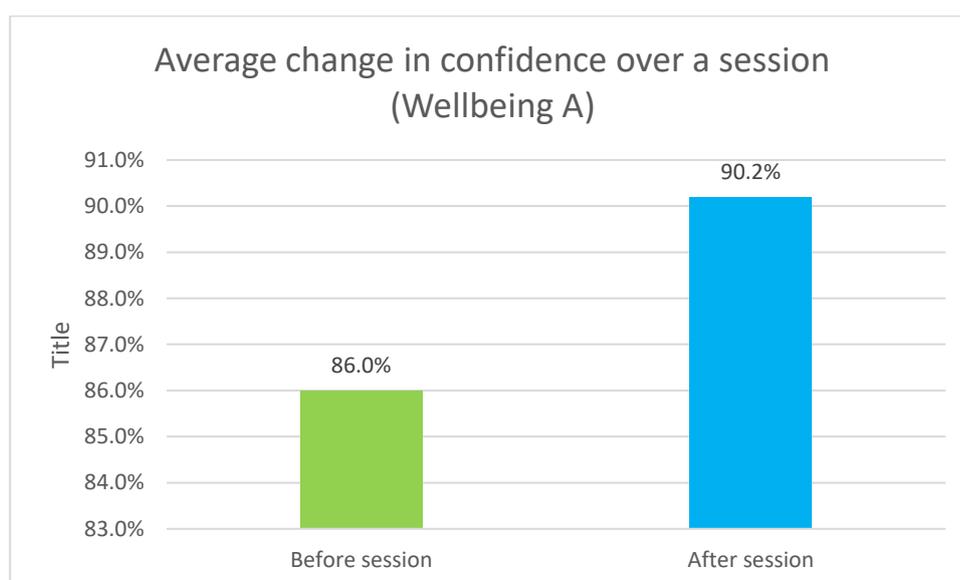
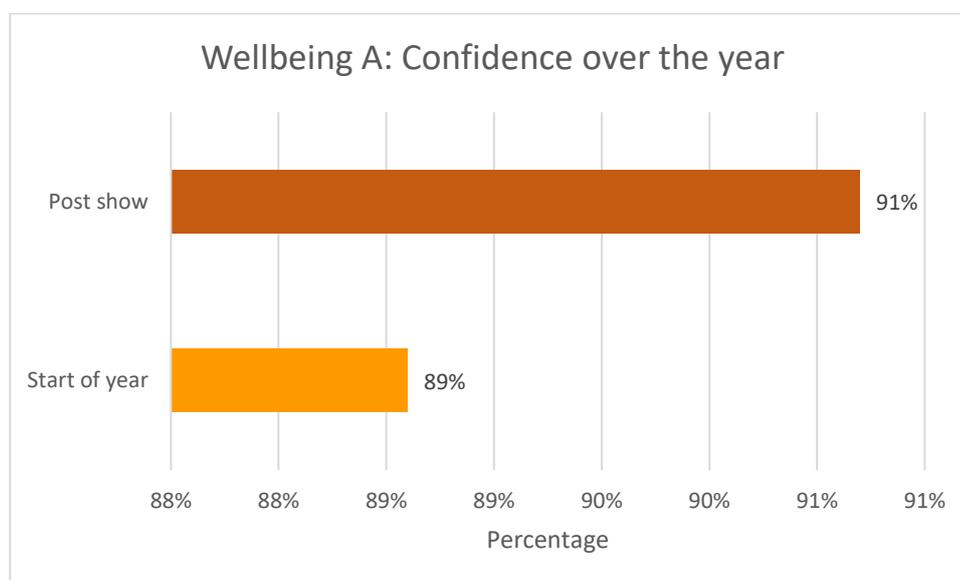
One participant, an older child from a mainstream school, made a comment which may reference the links between confidence, fitness and body shape – something that can be an issue with self-perception in young people.

“It makes me think I can achieve anything in dance, no matter what my body shape.”

Child from mainstream school, Year 2

2.5. Participants gained confidence and self-expression

Confidence showed a 2% rise between the start and end of the two projects in data taken from questionnaire results. Scores on confidence were high, and the average score after the show itself was over 90%. The average score for confidence generally went up by around 5%.



Parents' views of changes in their children's confidence due to the sessions also supported the conclusion that confidence was raised. When considering the effect of the weekly dance class, they rated the statement 'my child is more confident' 4.7 out of 5, and gave the same score to 'my child has more confidence in dancing'.

These very positive scores are backed up totally by comments from participants:



“Dancing relaxes me and makes me feel confident.”

Participant explaining how dance affects them

“Being able to show your inner self through dance.”

Participant explaining what they liked about dance

“That you can make it your own.”

Comment from participant explaining why they like dance

Both partner organisations and Stopgap themselves felt participants had benefitted in confidence from the project.

“Initially it was fun, they really enjoyed it, and then actually the performance itself – it was incredible to watch, I was in tears watching it, and they were SO proud of themselves. And their families had gone to see, and they talked about it for weeks afterwards – it still comes up! The sense of achievement and the sense that they did this performance and it was in a festival, it was lovely. It was colourful and vibrant and energetic, and they just really felt they were properly part of it rather than just tokenistically involved. That’s wonderful.”

Ali Hagger, Operational Manager at Leading Lives

“It was really clear that people with disabilities left feeling like they had been in a professional production which they could never imagine they would be in.”

Dougie Evans, Stopgap Producer of Outdoor and Community Productions

For volunteers, the sessions also had a very positive effect on confidence.

“I think it has raised my confidence more. and in relation to other people.

Watching you in your dancing with other people, you’re not so in yourself, you’re part of a team, a group, a cast...

That’s what I like, that working as a team, yes!”

Conversation between Catherine Watson, Stopgap volunteer (and participant), and her mother.

Some participants showed very high levels of confidence.

“I am confidently performer of all time

Love performing on stage

I love leading the team

I’m a good performer”

Four participants’ questionnaire comments from the Garage

“I can dance better than Tony. I like to watch YouTube and copy and make up my own moves.”

Disabled participant questionnaire answer on what might they enjoyed about dance.

Participants often described self-expression and the expression of emotion as a way that dance helped them feel more confident.



“Expressing myself and forgetting about all my problems.”

Participant discussing why they like dance

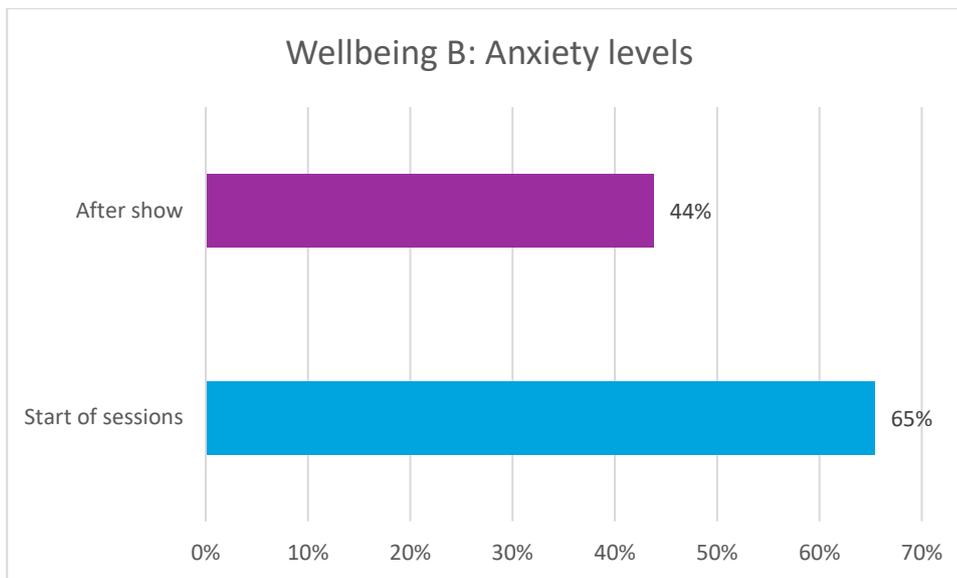
“It's one way to express yourself. I've done dance for many years and it's hard to pinpoint a reason”

Participant discussing why they like dance

“[I like how] How every movement can have different emotion.”

Participant discussing why they like dance

Anxiety and worry generated either internally or externally was felt to be overcome during and through dancing:



“Worried if people might judge you”

Participant reply to ‘can you think of any barriers for people like me to become a professional dancer’

“It helps get rid of any worries or anger I have”

Same participant reply to ‘what I like about dance’

“I can just be me and no one can judge me.”

Comment from disabled participant

“It is creative and even if you're shy you can become a different person while dancing.”

Comment from non-disabled participant



Ready for the Opportunity – Emily

Dance training was brand new to Emily. She was from a special school and had never been in a dance class before. Straight away, her movement vocabulary grew more and more varied – she was so confident in rehearsal the dance teachers gave her new tasks all the time. She was a great improviser – she had the desire to move:

“If you asked her to just get up and dance, she’d just get up and dance!”

Dance teacher

Once she had this opportunity to learn, she took it and ran with it. She picked up movement quickly, paid attention to detail, asked questions and was ready to rehearse again and again until it was right.

“Her mindset and her commitment were there.”

Dance teacher

Emily also had massive anxiety about performing – but she conquered that and performed brilliantly, taking that experience and confidence with her.

“When she came back into the project the next year she just said ‘Okay, I know I have this anxiety, I know it is going to wobble me but I can do it – and I’m ready for the next challenge.’ The only obstacle for her is opportunity – that’s it!”

Dance teacher

Rehearsals were over a long period in order to build up skills, and other people involved witness the change in participants.

“There was a girl that had started out being a little bit destructive at the beginning, a little bit of attitude, and then throughout the visits she turned into being the one who was really performing. She really connected with the music, and [the teacher] had told me she really loves the music, she downloaded it, and that was a real ‘in’ for her.

She was the one who was really encouraging the rest of the group, ‘Come on, focus’, and she was the one I would also draw out and say ‘Oh can you guys give it a little bit more soul’. We were trying to emulate some of her enjoyment of the movements...because of her commitment to it, I ended up giving her an extra role.”

Siobhan Hayes, Assistant Artistic Director, Stopgap

“They were hesitant at first and got more and more confident as weeks went on.”

Finlay James, Stopgap apprentice dancer and teaching assistant

“The progression I saw in terms of their confidence and their creativity, in terms of how they were able to respond to us as artists, and in a way to see them in their own artists’ worlds as well growing over the months was quite inspiring.”

Tommy, teaching assistant (who taught during the initial dance teacher’s maternity leave)

This could be expressed in different ways.

“Through the first one he was – quite bossy, quite liked to take control, always questioning things. We’d be saying ‘oh imagine someone hands you some heavy bags and pretend that it’s



heavy' and he'd say, 'Yeah but it's *not* heavy.' He wasn't having any of it! In the second one, even in the way he moved, he was just so much more confident to give things a go... you could really see the difference.

We definitely found him much more sensitive and softer – he wasn't afraid of showing that bit the second time round. [He had] a more soft and eloquent way of moving. In partner work as well, he was doing nice duets with other students, which was interesting – quite often in the way he was speaking it was shouting and being heard, whereas in the movement it was a nice two-way conversation.”

Dance teacher whose class took part in Seafarers for two years discussing participant

2.6. Participants' aspirations were raised

Aspirations for participants, and participants' own aspirations for themselves, were raised as a result of the programme.

Participants often revealed raised aspirations for the future which went hand in hand with their improved confidence.

“Dance is my passion!”

Stopgap teaching assistant (ex-volunteer)

The raising of aspirations, and the feeling that they could achieve, amongst participants was seen as coming from high expectations for them from Stopgap.

“I met someone who said that in some other places they 'don't expect very much [for people with learning difficulties], and we find that all the time. I think Stopgap have got that right, their expectations are high, and they demand a lot and they get it. They achieve amazing results with it, and that does the young people a lot of good and gives them the feeling that they *can* do things, as opposed to that they can't.”

Parent of disabled participant, Year 2 and 3

When asked about their own confidence levels concerning their child's future after the dance classes, parents scored 4.3 out of 5, suggesting strongly that having seen their child's confidence grow, and the progress made in the classes they also had more confidence in turn.

When asked whether aspirations for their child had changed as a result of this involvement, results were positive overall, with two people saying 'greatly', two saying 'a little' but two saying 'no'.

“Greatly (a realisation of the possibilities open to James as a result of this fantastic project).”

Parent comment, Year 2 on whether their aspirations for their child had been altered (child's name has been changed).

The negative replies seemed to emphasise the personal situation and challenges for the participant rather than the sessions themselves.

“No (with Jane it's always one day at a time, but it's great when she has had a good experience, including performing).”

Parent comment, Year 2 on whether their aspirations for their child had been altered (child's name has been changed).

Teachers, parents and Stopgap staff linked the development of confidence directly to the Stopgap ethos. Expectations for the participants were seen by schools as high – and sometimes higher than the perceived expectations of the schools themselves.



“I think that that was quite a big transition, from the start when they [the participants] were working with their own little groups, then that sudden rehearsal when they all came together.

That was a big step, and quite overwhelming to begin with, considering they didn't do that very many times before the actual performance...I think the performers gave a lot, because the expectations were high. I think often with the areas that we encounter with the learning difficulties; the expectations are not high enough. Stopgap achieve it and it's wonderful to see that.”

Mother of a participant, Year 2 and 3.

There were clear routes to developing skills and those taking them often had aspirations of gaining more experience and taking on new roles – for example Catherine Watson, who has been a workshop participant and volunteer, and would like to become a dance teacher. The input from Stopgap staff and their relationships and support were highly valued by people whose aspirations developed in this way.

Others started off as a volunteer but are now well on route to becoming a professional dancer and member of the Stopgap team.

2.7. A lasting change?

It seems clear that participating longer often did mean that outcomes continued and increased. This is clear from participant comments and from teacher comments. However, due to some difficulties with accessing the evaluation approach, this is not always indicated by the numerical data.

One teacher discussed how they could see how participants who carried on with her group through the Seafarers performance into Frippery the next year had noticeably progressed technically throughout, demonstrating how much they had learned, but also referred to their more resilient attitude.

“I suppose it's confidence as well, confidence to go for it and they've already had a really positive experience – Seafarers was a really positive experience for them and they've then done that in front of an audience, and then they say ‘Okay, well now I'm a dancer! I'm ready for the next thing!’ and some of them came in really buoyed up.”

Abby Page, dance teacher at John Grant school, Year 2 and 3

When asked how it felt to be involved with Frippery after two years of the Seafarers project, one participant said

“Really good – before, I was out of sorts. It's better this year than last year really!”

Participant in whole Seafarers project

However, the same participant scored all wellbeing measures at 100% (end of session scores) throughout Year 2 and Year 3, showing the issues with data collection with this group.

With some longer-term participants, the scoring system does not seem to reflect quantitative outcomes for the person. This could be as participants were ‘learning’ to use the scoring system and became more accurate as they went along. ‘Emily’, for example, scored sessions slightly lower during the second year than the first year where, especially at the start of the first year, her scores were much higher. This could reflect either a greater confidence with expressing herself as not completely happy, or could be a result of her greater wellbeing actually meaning that she can see how limited her previous wellbeing was. This model of scoring is not uncommon in our experience of evaluation with learning disabled participants.

2.8. Conclusion

It seems clear that wellbeing has increased in a number of ways for participants in this project but also for the people in their families. Audiences enjoyed the productions, and teachers and other adults working with the



groups gained in confidence. These are strong outcomes for the Seafarers project. There is also helpful learning for the future to help guide new projects.

We find that:

- Participants enjoyed the sessions.
- Disabled participants in particular felt happier as session progressed.
- The music was popular.
- Participants enjoyed the social nature of the sessions and made friends.
- They enjoyed movement and feeling fitter, and expressing their emotions.
- Participants gained confidence as time went on, and this helped disabled participants as sometimes they felt 'judged' by others.
- Levels of confidence amongst participants starting the dance sessions could be widely varied, depending on prior experience.
- Aspirations for participants were raised during the course of the programme.
- Expectation from Stopgap for the participants were also high, and this helped participants exceed their own expectations and often change their own aspirations for the future.
- Parents aspirations for the future were often raised to a varying extent, but evidence for this is limited.
- Teachers and other staff members often developed more skills and different aspirations for the future.
- Dance teachers gained wellbeing from the sessions.
- Longer term participants saw further positive benefits from the project.



3. Skills developed and opportunities enhanced for partners and participants

In this section, skills and opportunities are presented together as they often linked. Gaining skills and having access to more opportunities was identified as an outcome for all stakeholders: participants, volunteers, dance teachers, partners and Stopgap Dance Company staff. For participants, dance skills were gained during sessions. Opportunities included the opportunity to take part in Seafarers itself, and to gain knowledge of performance and what is involved, and to have experience of it. There were also decisions made about opportunities in the future – for example, to continue dance training or to continue developing different roles within the dance session setting by becoming a volunteer. The question of whether that opportunity will be available in the future is also important.

In this section, we draw on feedback from teachers' reflective journals, interviews with teachers, participants, volunteers, partners and Stopgap staff to explore the growth in skills and what new opportunities arose.

We find that:

- Participants gained a range of skills.
- Where measured, dance skills mostly improved, particularly in areas of creativity.
- Some participants experienced quite significant changes to their lives as a result as a result of the project.
- For many disabled participants, this was their first opportunity to try out dance and this was very meaningful for them.
- The project has identified and stimulated demand for inclusive dance in the region.
- As a direct result of Seafarers, there are new inclusive dance classes running from Sept 2019 involving the Stopgap trained dance teachers.
- Many people feel the end of the project effectively blocked opportunities particularly for participants with a strong dance talent identified. Given the geography and transport issues in the East region, this is particularly key.
- At least three of the teachers are explicitly already continuing to teach within inclusive dance (outside of Stopgap itself). All the teachers feel they have gained skills and opportunities as a result of the project which they will continue to use.
- Stopgap staff also gained new skills and experience.

“Amazing. Hugely complex performance allowing for many varying abilities. I had no idea what I was travelling to Yarmouth for but am very pleased I did. This must have taken an immense amount of rehearsal time and coordination - geographically among the schools too!”

Response on audience questionnaire from Year 2.

3.1. Participants gained dance skills

Rehearsals for dance groups took place often over around eight months. This was to give plenty of time for participants to gain dance skills and to learn the choreography for the production. As participants arrived with a range of different dance skills and abilities, this was crucial.

“[It was a] very long period of time, almost a year – but very important because we were working with people with no dance experience, and needed to build confidence and dance skills.”

Finlay James, Stopgap apprentice dancer and teaching assistant

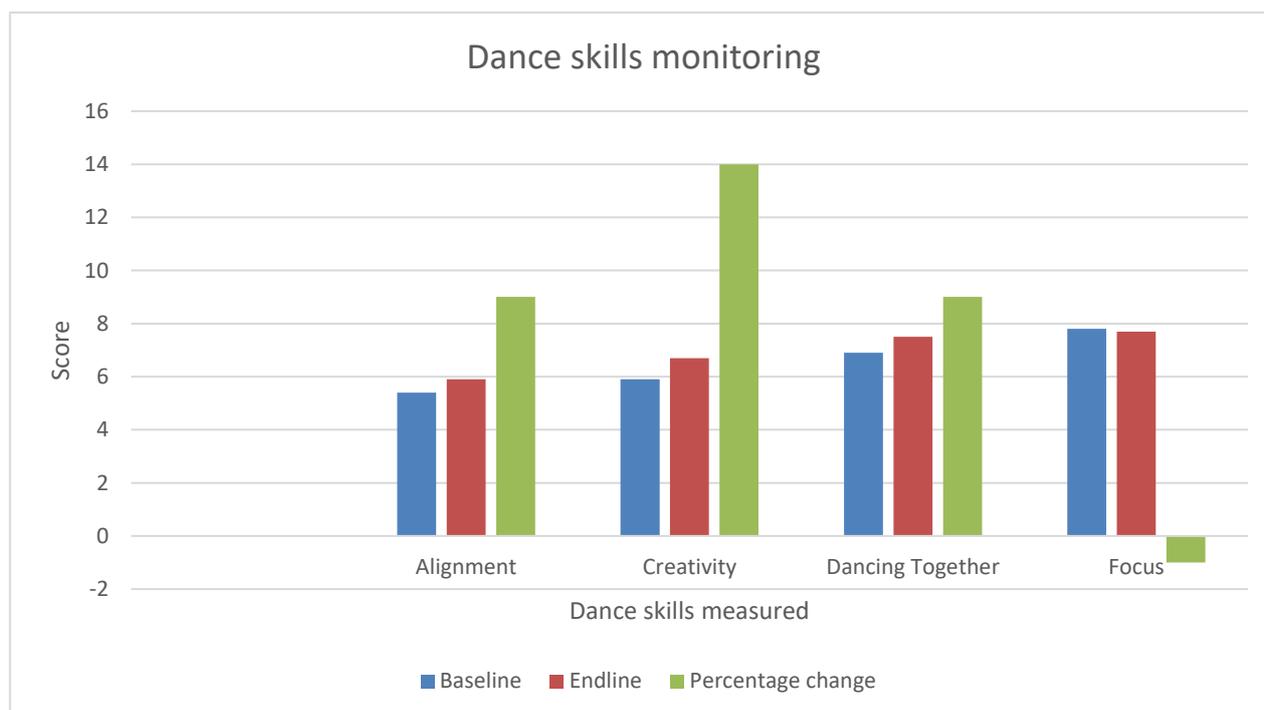


This was hard work, but produced great results. The rehearsal process then came together a day or two before the performance.

“It was very well managed. Everyone knew what they had to do and when.”

Finlay James, Stopgap apprentice dancer and teaching assistant

Skills gained by participants were assessed in two ways; through assessments of dance skills carried out by Stopgap staff, and by teacher observation. Stopgap staff scored participant skills in four areas – alignment and control, creativity, dancing together, and focus. Data was collected at the start and at the end of Year 2 for four different dance groups, two in schools and two in dance companies.



The results indicate that overall, dance skills increased over the course of the year for all dance skills except focus. Alignment and control rose by 9% over the year, and creativity, which displayed the largest increase, went up by 14%. Skills in dancing together rose by 9% as well, while the average score for focus for the schools fell by 1%, not likely to represent a real change. There were large differences in scores between and within groups. This could be down to differences in the groups themselves, or by the way teachers used the scoring system, or other factors.

Comments from teachers and Stopgap staff also describe how skills of participants around these areas, noting the way they developed over what might seem like very long periods of rehearsal time. This level of time input was important as the participants were often starting with no dance experience, and they needed to build up confidence and the dance skills in order to perform in a challenging public show.

One teacher reported that initially, their group had skills that were in a way limited.

“[The participants as a group] had not been challenged to move out of their normal functioning daily routine. Their body skills were very functional in all of their movements, and quite restricted in that respect and their stamina levels were very low, right at the beginning.”

Dance teacher with disabled group

Disabled people in the groups had been able to work on skills which were often harder for them to access through opportunity.

“They worked on things which for access groups are very difficult to do. Contact improvisation and things like lifts, working to counts, they were really key dance skills which a lot of access



groups don't teach. It's really hard to do 'safe touch' in a way that non-disabled classes would take for granted, but actually in an access group it's so difficult to get people to understand safe touch principles but when you start adding contact dance into the mix it starts becoming very complicated.

It was a nice way of, in a very tangible and tactile way, integrating disabled and non-disabled dancers into the same class. With Seafarers, one group did one section, and another group joined in with another section – I think for the public it looked like everyone joined in everything, but of course we know that that isn't the case - whereas with Frippery they really were mixed up, and there were no two ways about it, they would end up somewhere new with someone different every time they did it. That was a great way of integrating those two groups of participants together.”

Dougie Evans, Producer with Stopgap

Dance teachers commented on the individual ways that participants developed their skills. Within groups there were often a variety of abilities and ways of progressing. Higher ability dancers could often develop skills and then take these and apply them in individual ways.

“[Participants] developed [their skills] in different ways depending on who they were. [With] some of our more capable dancers, I saw their movement vocabulary⁵ expand massively throughout the time. Obviously, they love to dance, they bring their own movements, they love to show off, but we all have our favourite movements and we tend to run on a loop of those movements.

I think when you bring outside influence in and say 'you can do this and you can do this', you bring different tasks and creativity to it and they begin to expand their movement vocabulary.”

Dance teacher interview feedback

Alignment and control - Sometimes the changes might have seemed small, but were crucial for participants, and this quote sums up the bespoke and adaptive approach the teachers took following the Stopgap principles.

“In terms of dance, art specifics, absolutely embodiment, there was one boy in particular. He was one of the two with [this group], and his attention was fairly low, but he was such a kind little boy and he was always checking with us and asking how we were. He had particular problems, not particularly in following instructions, but when you would ask him to stretch his arm up he would just raise his hand a little bit and not really extend his hand all the way towards the ceiling, which he was capable of.

By the end of it, we used various methods, and we encouraged and we encouraged, and we could see little differences....by the end of the project he did have a real understanding of what it means to stretch an arm. It might sound to any Joe Bloggs on the street like a really small thing, but actually for him it was a really big learning time. That's an example in terms of movement, embodiment...we did lots of kind of jellyfish-ey wiggling, and big steps, and that all grew as well. What it means to move, what it means to dance; I would say they had a much better understanding of movement in general.”

Dance teacher, Year 2, working with a group from a special school

⁵ Movement vocabulary means the number and variety of movements that a person uses. Alignment, posture, flexibility, balance, co-ordination are amongst the factors which contribute to it.



For some individuals there were really significant changes in the control they had and the confidence they had and this developed over the sessions. Speaking about one disabled woman who used a walking frame for the majority of the time but who took part in dance training over the third year, dance teachers said the following:

“By the end, I would say by January [two months in] we discussed with her about using the frame in the sessions because I’d seen her a couple of times not use it, and move across the floor with much more ease so we discussed it and she was like ‘yeah, I don’t want it anymore!’ Progressively throughout the sessions she moved with more and more ease, more and more quickly, by the training in other groups in April she was running.”

Dance teacher, Leading Lives

Creativity – dancers became more creative over the course of the sessions. For some, creativity and confidence went hand in hand to a point where they were happy to improvise as part of the dance.

“I do remember a particular point at the end of the third year when we were putting it all together, and there was the option of...[doing] some improvisation. The professional dancers, the Stopgap dancers, had a section where they dance together, and then various participants got up and improvised at the same time.

Their movement had definitely improved. There was one dancer in particular - I could see she totally had the same movement quality and picked up that from the Stopgap dancers, moving in a really interesting way.”

Siobhan Hayes, Assistant Artistic Director

Dancing together - some comments indicated development in several skills together – this participant has improved in control, but also in finding ways of dancing together using good communication skills.

“In my dance, what I do is I do a lot of lifting, because I’m really strong. I was taught to calm them down a bit first, and say ‘Are you okay for me to lift you?’ and if they say ‘No’ I won’t lift them at all, but if they say ‘Yes’ I do lift them. I make sure they are really comfortable first while I’m lifting them, while they’re up there. You can’t lift them if you don’t know about their health and safety!”

Alex, Seafarers dancer and festival volunteer.

These comments from a dance teacher working with a group helped to shed light on the way participants learned to dance together.

“In the third year there was a lot more focus on contact dance and partner skills, so I would say there was a definite improvement that there was a focus on that...and also more imaginative ideas that they put into their group work.”

Dance teacher

Focus – this was clearly a challenge area for Seafarers participants, although comments made by teachers indicate that some participants did make improvements.

“In this particular group, with the two that ended up performing, definitely I saw an improvement in their attention span. It was still fairly short, but it was definitely an improvement.”

Dance teacher, Year 2, working with a group from a special school



Overall it isn't clear that a great deal of difference was made in their overall focus, although the fact that they were able to perform in a major show in both years does show there was some ability to focus for these specific performances.

Feedback from the teachers showed that skills development could be especially pronounced when some participants carried on in a group over two years.

“We had a different group from Seafarers to Frippery, we had a different intake but some of those dancers carried on from the first project to the second. And then we had also new ones come into Frippery as well - and we noticed a huge jump from the ones who carried on to the ones who'd come in fresh. It was lovely to see because that reinforced how much they had taken on board during the past year and their ability to pick up information and run with it is really good.

Their ability to create movement given a task, they just go for it and try things out, and they're not worried about that. Also, [for] some of the more capable dancers, their movement vocabulary had expanded a lot more and they'd obviously picked up more movements and started to play with what their body could do, and remembered things from past experiences. So it's just looking much more interesting and a lot more technically able.”

Dance teacher of a group spanning Year 2 and 3.

3.2. Dance teachers gained a range of skills

Dance teachers and teaching assistants and volunteers involved with the sessions felt they had gained new skills through the opportunity of working on Seafarers projects. These skills were around communication, use of language, and in developing inclusive, responsive dance teaching. They also noted an increase in confidence and linked wellbeing outcomes.

These skills came from experience in the classes themselves but also from Stopgap training, described by one teacher as helping to focus on ways of 'running classes with all bodies involved'.

“[Taking an] active role, [developing] more confidence in being a teacher and being able to manage aspects of the class with a small group of people, like explaining something and keeping them on task.”

Finlay, teaching assistant and now apprentice dancer at Stopgap, describing how his skills had developed over the course of the Seafarers project

“I feel that with inclusive dance I've learned lots of skills – basically how to teach, either someone who's got special needs or...more complex needs, whereas unless I went into a specialist school I probably wouldn't have that. That's [change in skills] all down to Stopgap really, and their tuition, because they're extremely good at what they do.”

Caroline Spandler, dance teacher.

Some felt that training had further refined their existing practice in inclusive dance, but that the Stopgap syllabus and training had given them specific new techniques and outlooks to enable teaching in an open, inclusive manner.

“There was an 'open language' approach which wasn't specifying you had to do this movement or that movement, it was using open language like 'do a push movement, do a pull movement, do a rise' and so that wherever you are, and whatever that means to you, you do that.”

Dance teacher in interview



One teacher mentioned that the training also helped in areas other than Stopgap sessions – therefore having an impact that was wider than the Seafarers project itself, before Seafarers had even completed.

“There’s so much of that that’s come into other areas of my work as well, so that it’s really wonderful training.”

Dance teacher commenting on Frippery training.

Dance teachers also gave positive feedback in interviews about how their involvement had affected their wellbeing. There was clear enjoyment of the process.

“It was brilliant, it was really brilliant, and I think the best part of it...is getting to know the personalities, then you can make the best of what they bring. They all bring different personalities to the dance and that’s the lovely thing about it.”

Dance teacher, Seafarers and Frippery

This teacher found something new in the Stopgap approach which linked to her genuine love of dancing, and that was to actually be in the performance at the same time as the children she was working with. She linked it to how she felt about dancing when she first began, before teaching.

“I danced because I loved it; the performances were like an added bonus. I wasn’t too fussed when I became a teacher to let the performing things go a little bit more, but actually when we did Seafarers the first time and we got told that there was quite a lot of choreography for the teachers to learn, I was a little bit worried because I’m quite slow at learning choreography - but then when it actually came to the performances, I really enjoyed it and it sparked my passion off a little bit more.

Since Seafarers I’ve done quite a few performances and actually really enjoyed them, so if I did other projects in the future and there was an opportunity to work with the participants but also be in it, then I think I’d be very interested in doing that again.”

Alysha Hudson, dance teacher of inclusive group

Teachers reported that they gained in confidence themselves, both in terms of teaching skills (related to the next section) and following a sense of pride when the project went well.

This confidence often led them to make different decisions for the future in addition.

“I feel more confident, definitely. I would never have thought of having my own inclusive dance program so to me that is totally invaluable and I’d like to do two classes, one for primary school children and one for young adults because that is totally needed as well.”

Caroline, Stopgap dance teacher.

There are also examples of people taking strong paths to progress through the Seafarers programme. Catherine Watson, for example, started out as a dancer in the sessions and became a volunteer where she helped other participants learn. Finlay James, now an apprentice dancer with Stopgap, was invited to attend the teacher training in Year 2 and then became a teaching assistant. He was very successful, and some of the participants really related to him.



Personal and professional progress with Seafarers

Finlay James first started dancing in 2012 and trained in ballet and contemporary dance. Before the Seafarers Project he had already had experience in working with inclusive dance with Candoco dance company's youth group, Cando2, and was also a member of DanceEast Centre for Advanced Training.

Finlay was invited to the teacher training day at the start of the second year of the Seafarers project and became a teaching assistant, learning to support participants in the project. 'It was a very good opportunity' he remembers.

He found the rehearsals very enjoyable; he enjoyed the whole experience but could see all the participants were enjoying it too. He noticed that they were hesitant at first but, with his help and the help of the teachers, they became more and more confident as time went on.



He was able to take a more active role in the sessions and develop his own confidence in being a teacher. He already had dance skills but now he could further develop his teaching skills – managing a class, helping everyone stay on task and explaining everything clearly. Finlay gained more experience in working with people new to dance, and also with non-disabled dancers.

'He's this big tall guy with a slow and cool way of moving; some of the boys found it really fascinating and were able to lock into what he was doing. It was beautiful because what we saw was two boys with ADHD, who go at 100 miles per hour all the time, moving basically in slow motion – and the teachers were gobsmacked they were doing it,' remembers Anna Rowe, a dance teacher who worked with him in Year 2.

Of the Seafarers project, Finlay says, 'People who have never seen Stopgap are not going to expect the level of things that can be done by these really high calibre wheelchair dancers, doing things you would not think you would ever see a person in a wheelchair do.'

This experience has helped Finlay take some important steps in his career, and as a result of his successful involvement with Stopgap he has recently gained a new professional position within the company.

"He really excelled in the performance, and on the back of this auditioned for [Stopgap's] apprentice programme, where he is now an apprentice dancer. There's a real personal development and achievement there."

Sho Shibata, Stopgap's Executive Producer

The thing that makes him most proud is the dancers themselves – 'having them perform on stage, and them doing really well – all their work coming together.'

"It was fantastic and I was very honoured to be a part of it."

Finlay James

There were also, at certain dance session locations, students present in the classes on placement. Emma Novak, for example, was able to choose where to do her placement as part of her BA Hons course in Dance at the University of Suffolk, and chose to do her first placement at Leading Lives Community Hub in Stowmarket. She assisted in the training for Frippery, working with the teacher Anna Rowe, and was able to develop skills as a result.



“I was just very happy to learn, join in and be a part of this great project. To see how Anna could take the final piece and pull out elements to create warm-ups, games and exercises was very educational.”

Emma Novak, student teacher, Year 3.

3.3. Stopgap Dance Company

Stopgap staff also gained new skills as a result of this project. The aim was to enable staff to develop skills and to feel more empowered as a result. The skills development that resulted was varied and went hand in hand with the development of new ways of working.

Adaptability and management of change was important to develop in order to help the organisation produce a new kind of work which was more streamlined and more suitable for touring and for outdoor festivals, as discussed in interview with Sho Shibata (Stopgap Executive Producer). This meant the artists and choreographers needed to use adaptability and planning skills to find ways of altering the community-based work so that it became more intensive but more encapsulated in a shorter timescale – often just one week. These short periods might lead to participants who are more willing to give away time and to work intensively, and to stay throughout, while in longer term projects there can be ‘drop off’ which affects practice. However, potentially a shorter time frame could also be that the Stopgap ethos was less embedded in participants, which might also impact on delivery for the artists.

Stopgap also felt the obvious success of the project helped them be more confident in their approach and in the value of so strongly embedding their ethos in all their work, especially when working at scale and at a distance. This has raised their confidence in taking on more ambitious projects and also made them more strategic in what they plan to take on, directing their energy to projects which drive their aims forward, rather than needing to adapt projects to fit their aims.

Stopgap is keen to develop individual staff members’ skills in addition. For the two Producers of outdoor community productions, the role was their most developed producing role and gave them the opportunity to produce a large project (with the Executive Producer overseeing). This development of skills and experience meant that new opportunities then opened up elsewhere in the performing arts world.

Maternity leave for the Artistic Director meant that the Assistant Artistic Director and also the Head of Talent Development acted as interim co-Artistic Directors, and developed skills in that role as a result. All this also helped to develop the resilience of Stopgap as a company.

Sho explained that skills developed through this project included knowing when do teacher training, how to develop artists further, and how that linked to the performances. In addition, a larger project scale also led to the need for staff to rely on and further develop communication skills (for example, during skype sessions) to discuss, clarify and help with issues raised by teachers while not actually being present at the dance sessions. A greater number of sessions over a much wider geographical area further from Stopgap’s base made this necessary. It also developed staff skills in working with different teacher training outcomes as the training was sometimes applied by (and embedded in) different teachers to different extents. This may also lead to further development in monitoring how the impact of training is working for the community of teachers in practice, and in thinking how to improve the process of delivery to a varied group of and to support this process to make ethos and practice development as good as possible.

New choreography also needed to be developed rather than adapting existing choreography and preparing this from a distance rather than ‘on the ground’ also represented the development of skills as it became harder to prepare a more tailored response to the people in the groups. This can lead to a healthy absence of potentially limiting preconceptions about participants, but can also be challenging for the teachers and challenging for staff trying to prepare teachers, as it is not possible to discuss ways to work with particular people with particular needs (Sho Shibata, interview).

Not least, being able to see how Stopgap’s skills had developed has led to that learning being reflected in the way funding bids are written, and in an increase in success. Developing the ability to articulate Stopgap’s offer in a stronger way was key to this, and shows a further skill development.

Another way in which skills were developed were in the area of evaluation itself – Stopgap staff trained in evaluation skills themselves, co-developing their evaluation plan with Ruth Melville, and then set up a working system with teachers having passed the training onto them. This involved planning what type of data to collect,



and then collecting and collating it, throughout the two years of the active programme and across all the dance sessions. Following this development of skills and confidence, alongside strong project management skills, staff now plan to further develop the implementation and use of evaluation for other projects.

3.4. (Lack of) Opportunities for the future

It was very clear that participants and families valued the Seafarers project. However, they also often raised an issue with opportunity around how to continue this. The opportunity to do this in the local area has not always been present. This has been partly because of a lack of inclusive classes, partly as the ethos and practice of delivering the classes has not been developed and also partly for logistical reasons.

“She was doing dance classes before Stopgap, but the thing that particularly inspired her on joining Stopgap was the inclusivity of it. We travelled from Chiswick in London to Guildford for a year, as part of the youth company’ and this was before the family moved to Norfolk and, happily, found that Stopgap then began a project in the area the year later.

It became impossible to do both financially and with time commitment....I think the outcome of Stopgap working up here is that the Garage where Catherine does most of her dancing, the Garage Dance Studio in Norwich, has now started an inclusive dance company and the teacher was trained at Stopgap.”

Parents of participant, Year 2 and 3

When asked if they would like to carry on, there was a very strong feeling that participants would welcome this. However, although opportunities are becoming available, the enthusiastic participants seem to now need more information about new classes as they were not sure where this was available.

“It would be nice, yes! In Norwich, or somewhere in Great Yarmouth, because we did it in Great Yarmouth, or it would be nice to do it on tour! Be on tour with Stopgap and get audiences to come and see it!”

Alex, participant in Seafarers performance, festival volunteer during Frippery and ex-street dancer.

However, there is now, as a result of Seafarers, the beginnings of new growth in this area as Stopgap trained dance teachers move to continue with inclusive dance classes despite the end of the project.

“We did carry on the class; the performance finished in May and we carried on the class just as a normal creative contemporary class up until the summer holiday, so that probably ran for another six or seven weeks just because the participants that had been coming...were really committed and really enjoying it...”

Not many of them had done contemporary before so we’re hoping to keep that class on - depending on numbers we’ll keep that contemporary class going and they will keep coming, which is good.”

Alysha Hudson, dance teacher of inclusive group

“One of the original intentions [of Seafarers] was to create or establish these inclusive dance groups in Norfolk and Suffolk, and to train teachers in order for them to carry this on once the project had finished, because as we all know the projects dip in and out and then run away and leave never work, and that isn’t what we wanted, we wanted these teachers to feel empowered to want to continue these groups or start up their own, so that’s really great that Caroline from Dancing Dimensions has carried that on.”

Charlotte Mackie



One teacher is continuing with a group developed at Leading Lives in Stowmarket as a result of the relationship formed there during the Stopgap projects. She is applying for funding dance sessions for another year, but also to widen this into a heritage arts project with the Museum of East Anglian Life. In addition to this, several members of the Leading Lives group now attend evening dance sessions away from the Leading Lives Hub at Dance East. This in itself shows how beneficial they have found the activity, and new horizons developing for both the participants and their families.

Perception and opportunity – Tommy Norris

Tommy's ideas around disabled dancers and inclusive dance changed when he came across a session run by Stopgap at a conference.

He says he was 'blown away' by the dance work in the video he saw and understood what disabled people were capable of.

The first time I saw [Stopgap at a conference] that was the big shift in my beliefs...

Tommy Norris

He had studied at the University of Suffolk, focusing on dance and disability in his second year. He chose to work with Stopgap when he heard they were working in Norfolk.

Having studied Stopgap's IRIS curriculum, he went on to work as a teaching assistant and also a teacher. His perceptions evolved with each new role as he always saw something new and motivating.

"The quality of work that I saw, and the progression that I saw in them still had an effect on the way that I perceived people with disabilities...in terms of their confidence and their creativity, in terms of how they were able to respond to us as artists; to see them grow over the months in their own artists' worlds was inspiring."

Tommy Norris

Tommy taught three groups of his own in 2019. He loved working in inclusive dance. Currently, Tommy is working on a postgraduate certificate in mental health and, although he has moved to a new part of the country, his ambitions have clearly been shaped by his time with Stopgap.

"I think it would be wonderful to try and facilitate some kind of youth [dance] company with abled and disabled dancers... the two years with Stopgap has been imperative to that - it's been a big shifting point in my perceptions, a big shifting point for what I want to do in the future as an artist."

When participants were asked what they liked best about the Seafarers project, Tommy was often mentioned.

"Tommy was my mentor twice...he taught me a lot of things, he taught me how to help. It's my dream that I want to be a dance teacher."

Catherine Watson, participant and volunteer teaching assistant.





3.5. Conclusion

The Seafarers programme itself has been a massive opportunity for the participants involved – to dance, to take part with others in a shared project, to perform in front of an audience and to take part on the Norfolk and Norwich Festival. It showed successful outcomes and genuine increases in wellbeing plus perception changes for many people.

In turn, it has generated new opportunity in the future This is in terms of leaving a legacy of teaching ethos and enthusiasm which is being followed up by dance teachers and will provide further opportunities for disabled and non-disabled dancers to receive the same benefits in inclusive classes in the future.



4. Perception change around disability and inclusive dance.

Perceptions of disability and of inclusive dance showed definite change over the course of the project, with the vast majority of this being positive. Disabled participants self-perception around their capabilities improved and non-disabled participants, relatives, and audiences changed their perceptions. Inclusive dance, which for many was entirely new, was valued in itself rather than in comparison to 'mainstream' dance.

In this section, we explore the extent to which the Seafarers project achieved its aims of changing perceptions of disability and of inclusive dance amongst both participants in the programme and others who came into contact with it.

This work draws on a mix of qualitative data gathering from participants, dance teachers, volunteers and group organisers, as well as reflections from project staff, along with quantitative data gathered by dance teachers from project participants.

We find that:

- Disabled participants' perception of the potential of disabled people to become professional dancers increased.
- Non-disabled participants' perception of the potential of disabled people to 'lead as full a life as non-disabled people 'all' or 'most' of the time' improved over their involvement with the project – although the majority still didn't think that this would happen more than 'some of the time'.
- All the non-disabled respondents agreed that disabled people can become professional dancers, and the majority 'strongly' agreed. This belief became stronger over the year, especially during Seafarers.
- Perceptions of disability show elements of strong change in some areas.
- Different partners came into the project with different perceptions and levels of understanding both of inclusive dance, and disability as a whole. It is likely that this shaped the participant outcomes. Some groups of non-disabled people with very limited experience of disability have a significant lack of understanding of the experiences of disabled people.
- There was a shift in perceptions of audiences, although most felt they already had positive views.
- Some comments made in qualitative data showed that some views of disability were positively intentioned but possibly misinformed.
- Schools' and schoolteachers' expectations of participants were sometimes less than participants were capable of achieving, and did achieve. There is a sense that expectations of what learning disabled and physically disabled people can do are often not high enough and so they do not reach their potential

4.1. Overall perception

In the same way as wellbeing data, data on perception change was collected differently for different participant groups. Two perception questionnaires were used, one for older and non-disabled participants followed the Spirit of 2012 nationally validated guidelines, and one for younger (under 14) and learning-disabled participants. The latter was developed by Stopgap with Ruth Melville Research. The questionnaires comprised a mix of closed (scored) questions and open questions. Data was collected at the beginning of each year⁶ as a baseline, and then at two or three points including after the performance⁷.

⁶ Year 1 was the year the project was set up and involved taster sessions, so no long-term changes could be tracked.

⁷ For older participants perception questions were used as per Spirit of 2012 guidelines, for younger participants and learning-disabled participants these were adapted to make them more accessible. See [Appendix](#) for examples of both.

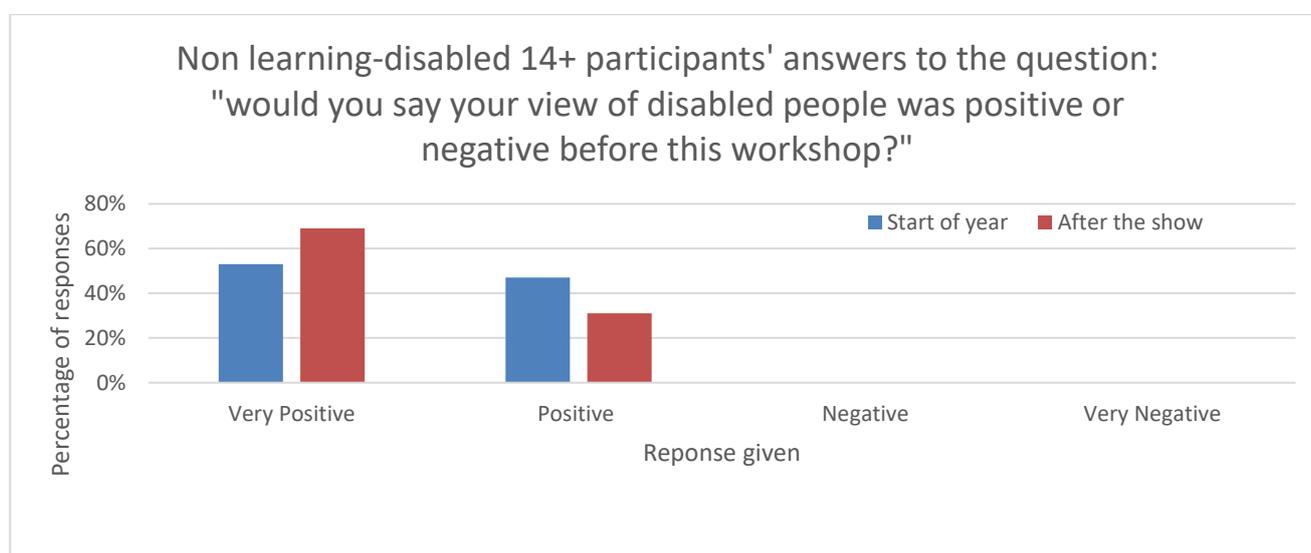


In addition, parents gave feedback at classes in Year 2, and audience feedback was collected at both Seafarers and Frippery performances. 18 interviews were conducted with dance teachers, some participants and families, and others associated with the project.

4.2. Change in perceptions of disability among audiences and non-disabled dancers

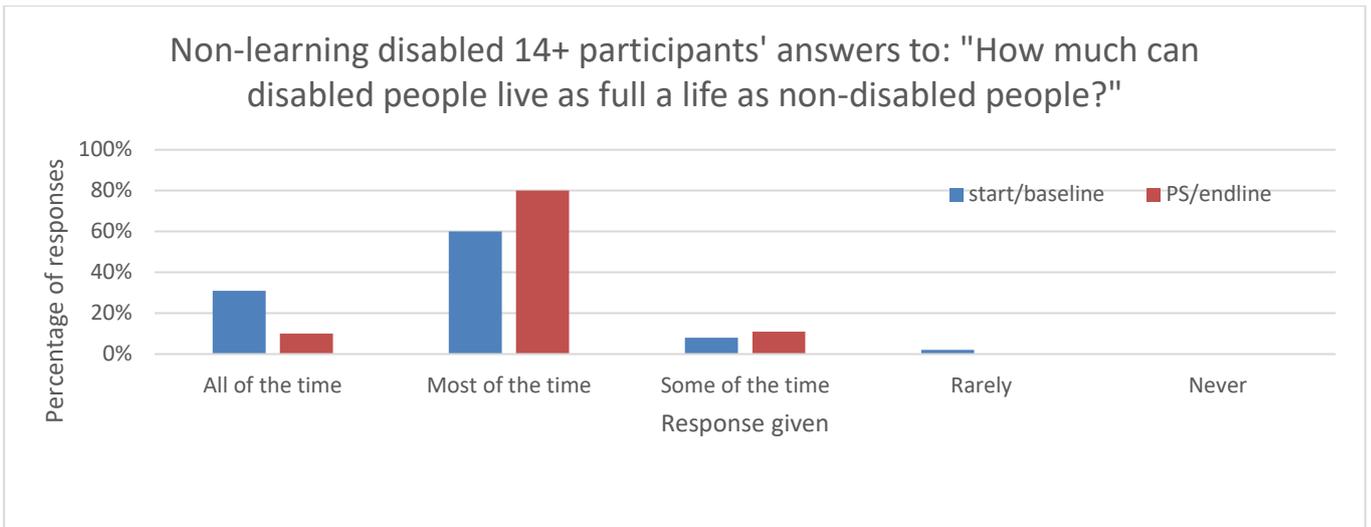
NOTE: Most answers in this section come from non-disabled participants, but strictly they are from people answering 'perception B' which was given out to everyone aged 14 or over who didn't have a learning disability which would make this set of questions inaccessible to them. As there were few or none disabled non-learning disabled participants, this is in effect non-disabled people over the ages of 14. Due to the recruitment routes, these were almost entirely secondary school pupils – so aged 14-18.

Non-disabled participants had a positive view of disabled people. There was a shift in perceptions among participants, although again most felt they already had positive views, from 'agreeing' with positive statements about disability to 'strongly agreeing'. They generally thought that they could live as full a life as non-disabled people, but this view changed over the year to become slightly less positive.



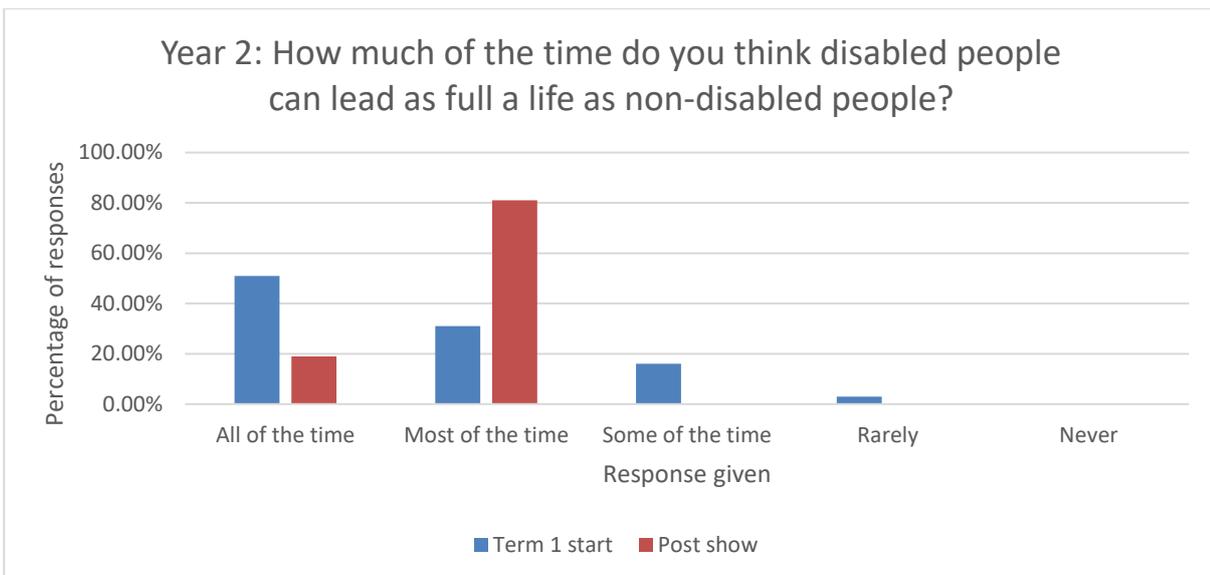
Non-disabled dancers' responses to the perception questionnaire showed that their reported view of disabled people were 100% positive⁸. All the responses said the view was either 'positive' or 'very positive' and there was a 16% change towards 'very positive' on average during the year. A similar change happened in both years, but was more pronounced during Seafarers (year 2).

⁸ Please note, this is one of the Spirit of 2012 required questions which measures a self-perception of people's preconceptions. It doesn't actually measure how people actually feel about disabled people.



90% of non-disabled respondents felt that disabled people could lead as full a life as non-disabled people 'all' or 'most' of the time. The proportion of people saying 'most of the time' rose by 20% during the year, on average, and the proportion of people saying 'all of the time' fell by just over that.

However, the pattern was slightly different in Year 2, when Seafarers took place, and Year 3, when Frippery was performed. In Year 2, the general pattern of both years was even more pronounced – the proportion of people saying 'most of the time' rose by 50% over the year. This time, the proportion of people saying 'all of the time' fell strongly, but those saying 'some of the time' fell as well.



However, in Year 3, Frippery, there was a different swing in perception. This time, the proportion of respondents saying 'some of the time' went up (80% of respondents said this at the end of the year) and the proportion of respondents saying 'all' or 'most' of the time both fell.



'confident' and 'inspirational'. However, at this level the words 'unable' and 'legs' appear, and many of the smaller words point to some perceptions about disability being restrictive, such as 'affecting', 'impaired', 'difficulties', 'struggle', 'can't' and 'disorder'. There is a sense of 'not being able to' and more of a sense of physical limitation.

This wordcloud (figure 2) of responses from non-disabled people at the end of the year shows that 'wheelchair' still features very strongly. However, other words have changed. Words like 'inspiring' and 'inspirational' have grown, as has 'confident' in particular, along with 'creative', 'strong', 'clever' and 'amazing'. Some of the words associated with restriction have receded or gone, such as 'can't', 'limited' and 'unable'.



Figure 2: Wordcloud -Three words when you think of disabled people - Over 14 non-learning disabled answers - End of Year

In places, some other words have cropped up which may at first seem similar – 'mentally' has arrived along with 'physically', but the data show that these come from two identical responses from participants in the same group that simply said 'mentally, physically'. This seems to be more of a description of potential types of disability rather than qualities of disabled people.

Overall, the themes expressed by final word cloud seem more positive and less to do with a sense of limitation than those at the beginning, although overall both clouds have many positive responses and the use of wheelchairs remains a strong feature in the perceptin of non-disabled participants.

As discussed, many responses do indicate a perception from non-disabled participants that disabled dancers were very happy, determined, confident brave and inspirational. These are all highly positive qualities.

“Fabulous, clever, inspirational
Limited, special, strong
Special, strong, creative”

Three responses from non-disabled participants in year 3.

These are clearly intended as a positive although they could perhaps be considered a rather romanticised response in places. Many disabled people would fit many of these words, but they may be considered something of a generalisation.

While the comments made do not always mean the speaker thinks *only* disabled people have problems in areas of dance, or that they are insurmountable problems, the frequency of respondents who felt there would be problems was high and did remain quite high at the end of the year.



Non-disabled participants were also asked if they could think of any problems for a disabled person to become a dancer, and data was provided from three groups during the two years. As these wordclouds indicate (figure 3) , there was a strong strand of answers that simply said 'no' along with some answers which showed the belief that problems could be overcome with commitment and confidence. The 'no' group actually fell slightly, from 40% of responses to 30% of responses, during the year, but remained the strongest 'theme' of the answers. Elsewhere, themes in the answers did not change hugely - 'judging' grew slightly at the end of the year, and this was sometimes expressed as 'opinions' of others also. People indicated movement, judgement of others, and a perception that there would be difficulties. Some themes like 'confidence' seems to grow slightly. The word 'can't' disappeared, but the word 'unable' continued.

Can you think of any problems for a disabled person in becoming a professional dancer?



Figure 3: Can you think of any problems for a disabled person in becoming a professional dancer? (14 and over non-learning disabled answers)

Often, the language used shows assumptions within a social model of disability: either with a positive view:

“No, the possibilities are endless”

Year 1 taster participant when asked if there were any problems for a disabled person to become a professional dancer.

Or recognising barriers others' perceptions or assumptions will put in place:

“People might not believe in them”

Non-disabled participant when asked if they could think of barriers to disabled people becoming dancers.

“Other people bringing them down”

Non-disabled participant.

“They may not be given the same opportunities as non-disabled people”

Non-disabled participant.



Many other comments, especially towards the start of a year, show a more medical model understanding of disability:

“Not being able to use their legs”

Senior school participant, Year 1

“Some can't walk”

Senior school participant, Year 1

“Hurt themselves”

Senior school participant, Year 1

“They might injure themselves”

Participant in dance school, Year 2

There was sometimes the sense that a disabled person would see ‘dancing like a non-disabled person’ as an ideal to aim for, but would find it very hard to get there. This assumes all are aiming for the same goal in the same way, rather than understanding that all participants to reach their own outcomes using their own skills development paths.

“They might not be able to do the moves like everyone
No because they can become as good as a non - disabled dancer
Cannot walk or travel like an able bodies dancer
Can't walk or do the same as an able person”

There is still a sense of disabled people being thought of as a small, perhaps marginalised group amidst non-disabled dancers, with the implied suggestion that non-disabled dancers are more ‘capable’ or valid dancers, and also placing the onus onto the disabled dancer themselves:

“I think that they may not always understand and may struggle, but if that's what they want to do then there's nothing stopping them.”

Senior school, Year 1 taster

“None at all as long as they commit to it.”

Non-disabled participant when asked if there were barriers in the way of disabled people becoming professional dancers.

The above seems to show that some existing perceptions of disabled people from non-disabled participants could change, but also that it could be challenging to enable this. In one school for example, despite all the exposure to new information and experiences, the views of the participants, a group of non-disabled older participants, did not show a huge change. Their teacher reported that their perceptions of disabled people, of dance and of what the Seafarers performance was all about, were extremely difficult to address and seemed strongly rooted. They seemed to arise partly from a lack of experience of disability and disabled people personally, and perhaps from a general culture around them which also came from a lack of experience.

“They don't necessarily even know a disabled person, let alone someone who is disabled who dances...one of the questions was something like ‘what do you think would be difficult or would stop a disabled person from dancing’ and their [answer], coming from a 13, 14 year old, it would just be something like ‘because their legs don't work.’ Really factual, literal. Not because it might be hard to access a class for disabled people – a really interesting conversation.



I remember having to have a conversation [with Stopgap] about it and just saying 'I don't know how to get over this. I've talked to them about you, Stopgap, as a company, we've watched videos of the fact that you can clearly see dancers who are disabled dancing, and yet they still answer with those same [responses].' If you compared their answers at the beginning to their answers at the end they would have still been the same, so their perception actually of a disabled dancer, I don't think changed."

Dance teacher, interview quote

After this discussion, some new strategies were used to try to address this situation, with support from Stopgap staff.

"This group were an interesting bunch anyway, partly because of their age and partly because of the length of project, and we went through a lot of highs and lows with that group in terms of their motivation, their enthusiasm and their interest.

Christmas was a really hard patch for me and for them, to really just get them to want to be there, essentially. As it got to, February, March time, the run up to the performance, I remember saying to Siobhan [Hayes, Assistant Artistic Director at Stopgap] 'I'm banging my head against a brick wall, I'm saying the same things over and over again and it's not doing it' and things that I knew were important to Stopgap, they just weren't getting it.

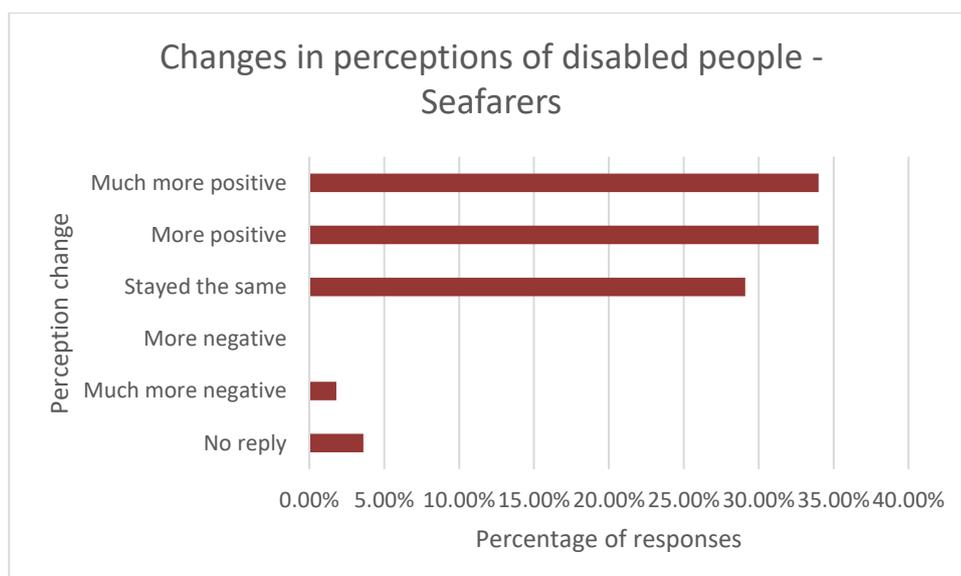
And Siobhan came in and essentially just backed me up because I didn't have an assistant, and said exactly everything that I'd said, was very stern with them and very straight with them, and then it all clicked. As we got to the performance, I had these enthusiastic, really professional dancers who, on the day, were just on cloud nine."

Dance teacher, interview quote

These are established perceptions which were often not easily changed but did see change by the end of the project. Time, support between staff delivering the training, and providing that framework for people to attach new perceptions to was important. While the perceptions themselves did not overtly appear to change greatly, participants did take part enthusiastically in an inclusive performance of dance sessions and a performance which showed that disabled people can overcome any perceived difficulties and be entirely successful. Those non-disabled participants with negative perceptions have now had a very positive experience of disability and inclusive dance which will hopefully work to counteract entrenched negative perceptions in the future.

Data from audiences showed there was a shift in their perceptions in of disabled people. 55 people answers audience questionnaires for Seafarers and 28 people answered them for Frippery. Data was collected in both years with some questions applied to both years and some applied in one of the years.

All audience members reported having positive views of disabled people before the event, and data collected in Year 2 (Seafarers) showed that 56.6% said this was 'very positive' and 41.8% as 'positive' (this information was not collected in Year 3). The chart below shows the changes in perception reported after the event. 68% of the audience reported that their perceptions of disabled people had become 'more' or 'much more' positive (same amount for each category), with almost 30% saying they had stayed the same – these could be people who said their view was already 'very positive'.



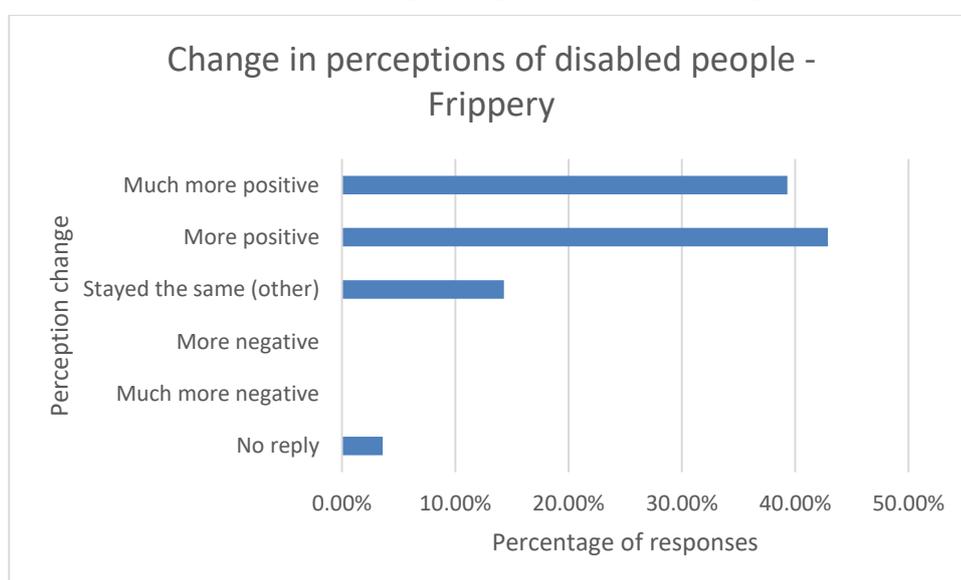
There was only a single negative comment, accompanied by the following response.

“Didn’t like seeing disabled people perform”

Response on parent questionnaire from Year 2.

It is impossible to know the thinking behind this comment, but potentially it could be a misunderstanding of nature of the ‘performing’ in this situation if the viewer perceived it as something the disabled participants did not have full control over.

When the Frillery audience was asked how their perceptions had changed (below), again a large section of the audience said ‘much more’ or ‘more’ positive, this time with roughly 40% of responses saying each. 14.3% answered ‘other’ but all of these responses gave a reason indicating that they already had a positive view.



These are again very positive results and show that perceptions of disabled people were overwhelmingly positive and also showed positive change.

“Come from Cameroon which has very poor/little care for disability, so was very interested to see UK treatment of it”

Audience comment, Year 2



“Amazed at how the wheelchairs and the great moves can happen!”

Audience comment, Year 2

People who indicated that their responses had not changed pointed out that they already had a positive view, and one stated:

“I’m not surprised to be extremely impressed with the performance.”

Audience questionnaire comment, Year 3 Frippery.

Impact on audience perceptions of disability was also noted at the performances, as reported back in interviews with family members of participants. This occurred when seeing learning disabled people in positions of responsibility, for example, being teachers as well as professional dancer. Seeing disabled people in such positions may well challenge audience perceptions of the potential for what is possible for disabled people.

“The impact of that on the disabled participant’s parents is really immense. I think that’s very powerful in terms of recalibrating what might be possible for their own child who is participating. I think it had never even occurred to them that the people leading might also have disabilities as well.”

Family member of participant.

Part of the audience was made up of volunteers from other parts of the project who also came to the performance. This included Festival Volunteers, one of which had been with Seafarers previously.

“The volunteers liked it, it was interesting for people to dance in wheelchairs, it was really good. It was creative and nice to get them involved as well. I thought the performance was amazing to watch.”

Alex, Seafarers dancer and festival volunteer.

In interviews, parents of participants noted the reactions of the audience around them at the performances themselves. Some people in audiences were drawn in after passing the performance and being engaged by it

“I think particularly [for] something like Frippery, which was in a public open space, where people hadn’t necessarily expected to watch it, [people] were passing by and stopped to watch and were excited by it. And at Seafarers as well because there were crowds, we didn’t feel the area was big enough to encompass all the people who want to see it!”

Parents of participant

This is a highly positive indication of public perceptions of disabled people, and the responses of these audiences are very encouraging.

They may not be a more widespread truth however. Other evidence collected in interviews does seem to suggest that while people here reacted very positively to their experiences of inclusive dance, the level of experience the general public have is low, and the perception that disabled people can be professional dancers is far from frequent.

“I just think they don’t have very much awareness really, people in general don’t. I’ve just been abroad with another dance company, wheelchair users, and I was getting on the plane with one of my dancers who is in a wheelchair and people were asking her where she was going and what she was doing, and she said ‘Oh, I’m going out to dance with a dance company,’ and they were like ‘What?? How on earth are you doing that?!’ - the general perception is just ‘What??’ so I do think for the general public it’s quite a new thing.”

Dance teacher



“People who have never seen Stopgap are not going to expect the level of things that can be done by these really high calibre wheelchair dancers, doing things you would not think you would ever see a person in a wheelchair do.”

Finlay James

It is likely that parent perceptions of disability also changed positively, but there is less data to inform this conclusion.

Schools' and schoolteachers' perceptions expectations of participants were sometimes less than participants were capable of achieving and did achieve, and partly this came from their experiences of seeing the disabled people in a different context (the school environment) and the requirement for schools to be protective of their pupils. This contributed, however, to a sense that expectations of what learning disabled and physically disabled people can do are often not high enough and so they do not reach their potential.

“A few teachers said ‘We haven’t seen them in this way before’ – being expressive and creative in dance classes.”

Dance teacher

“I tell you what we found interesting though was that there were quite a lot of preconceptions going on within the school.”

Dance teacher

This dance teacher explained that some members of staff were wary of the fact that one of the participants had the potential to react adversely to unfamiliar surroundings, like performing in a new location, outside, next to a live band and with a massive audience and huge cast – these changes could have knocked him. The expectation of some of the members of staff at the school were therefore that the participant might not cope in this scenario. There is no question that these members of staff are very skilled and also very familiar with the participants and their personalities and behaviours. As such, their concerns should be taken seriously; after all, schools will need to have risk assessments in place for exactly this type of event.

However, in the event:

“He just rose to it, he absolutely loved it, and really went for it and did the best dancing we’d seen from him really. But that was just a really interesting lesson in preconception – you can look at him during rehearsal and think you know [how he will react].

We kept saying well, we’ll wait and see, we’ll wait and see – we know that people change from rehearsal to performance and you never know in what way it’s going to be, but it’s a very different experience.

For him, it was massively positive - so for him, it could have been an opportunity squashed if that was a preconception that we went with, but as it was it was brilliant.

Dance teacher

This shows that while some preconceptions are based on evidence, this does have to be balanced with opportunity and taking a certain amount of risk. What can be achieved, with the right people, place, system, and learning styles, can overcome potential setbacks and show that a very positive outcome can be achieved which does not align with possible preconceptions. This is a balance which has to be considered realistically for performances.

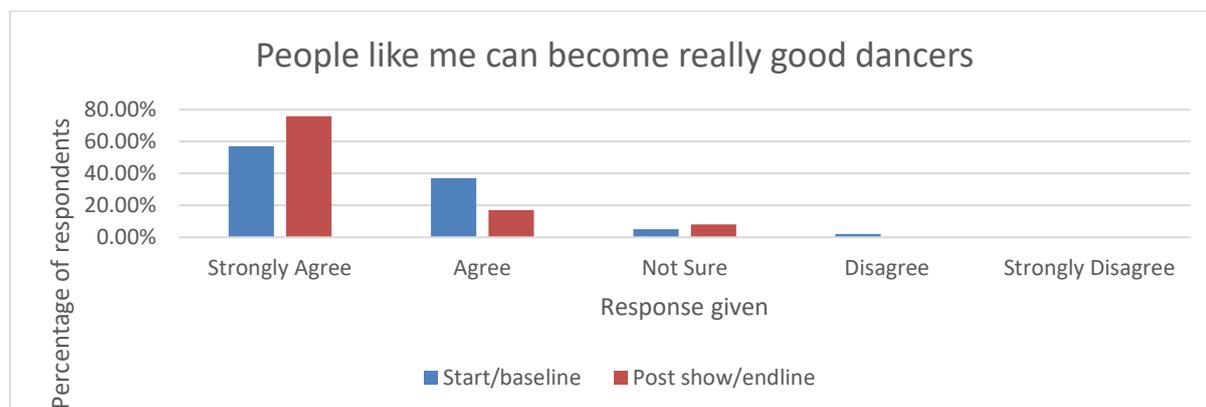
“How do you manage that risk assessment alongside actually giving people opportunity and letting them shine themselves and experience something new? It’s a tricky one!”

Dance teacher



4.3. Perceptions of disabled people of themselves as disabled dancers changed positively

Disabled dancers agreed or strongly agreed that they could become really good dancers, but their perception changed to become even more positive during the dance programmes. Their perceptions of possible problems to becoming a dancer changed in that the number of people who just said ‘no’ rose 22%, and this change was very similar for both years. Sometimes, we found that disabled people’s expectations of themselves could be rather low, but that having participated in dance sessions over time, they began to think of themselves more as dancers.



Over 90% of disabled participants agreed or strongly agreed when asked if “people like me can become really good dancers”. Overall this did not change greatly over the course of a dance programme, but during this time there was a swing of 19% to ‘strongly agree’ which came entirely from the ‘agree’ category. There was a small proportion of people who were ‘not sure’, and this rose very slightly, while those who ‘disagreed’ that people like them could become dancers changed their minds entirely for the better.

“After the Seafarers performance, all [the dancers] were saying ‘this is an amazing experience!’. They are all used to performing and rehearsal in their own group but then to suddenly be performing with the professionals...and to be part of that very big production was an amazing experience for them that sort of opened their eyes, I think, to a world that was outside their norm.”

Parent of participant in Seafarers and Frippery

“Nothing would stop me!”

Disabled participant questionnaire answer on what might stop them becoming a professional dancer

This shows a change in perception amongst the disabled dancers as they become more confident that they can become really good dancers. The trends are clearly upwards.

The qualitative data related to this asked participants if they could think of any problems to stop them becoming a really good dancer. Responses to this question changed over time as the sessions continued. By the end of the year there were generally a higher percentage of ‘no’ answers (up to 55% from 33%), showing that perceptions had changed – by now, things people had thought would be an issue for them had stopped being a problem.

The way perceptions changed was positive but also differed between groups– for example, in one school the greatest leap in ‘no problem’ comments is from 42% to 82% in the first term; in another, concerns about physical issues appear to fade but concerns over focus and the opinions of other people become more prominent. In another group consisting entirely of disabled dancers, 40% of dancers initially said there were no problems for disabled people to become professionals. This had gone up to 67% along with a small swing from ‘agree’ to ‘strongly agree’. ‘Balance’ persisted as a problem for one person, but they also commented on the progress they have made with it:

“For me my balance sometimes but I got so much better”



Participant, Frippery Year 3, Leading Lives Community Hub, Stowmarket.

Their comment shows their new confidence in that. Another child from a special school simply commented

“Practice makes perfect!”

Participant, Frippery Year 3, John Grant school

Clearly some of the participants did have concerns about health, but the level of these concerns too had fallen by the end of the training.

“I did used to do street dance. I did used to do, but I damaged my cartilage in my knee, so I had to retire from street dance. [With Stopgap sessions,] it was nice and calm, it was nice and gentle, and I got into it straight away because it was nice and calm.”

Alex, Seafarers participant, NNF festival volunteer and ex-street dancer.

This adds to the sense that participants’ perception of what inclusive dance was changed over time, and they found it to be more flexible and suitable for them than they thought.

Sometimes, participants felt that aspects of disability would be a barrier unless it was for professional dancers, and did not seem to have confidence that they could develop from one state to the other.

“Being in a wheelchair (except Stopgap dancers!)”

Participant questionnaire, Year 3

For some of the parents of disabled participants, seeing what the participants achieved in this project was enlightening for them as well.

“One of the girls was, or is, disabled, and I know from speaking to her mum, she felt like this was a huge thing for her child to be able to see that just because she’s got this and this doesn’t mean that she can’t dance, doesn’t mean that she can’t perform. I don’t think that she realised that there are things out there for her to do”

Dance teacher of girl in inclusive group discussing perception

New perceptions – a mother and daughter’s story

A mother listens to her daughter talking enthusiastically about the dancing she did today in the performance. Her daughter is animated and happy. She is one of only a very few disabled children in an otherwise non-disabled dance group, but she goes to a special school while all her friends go to the local primary.

This mum is used to being with her daughter – she goes to help her daughter every few hours with medication issues when she goes to new locations, and for both of them this made their bond very strong.

When they first started rehearsing, the girl was quite timid – but now she is happy to join in and happy to try anything. Her mother watched her grow – new confidence has meant greater independence. And this has given the mother more time for herself. It has changed both of them.

Today was the first time both of them understood what the inclusive dance performance meant to them. Here in this performance there are people with various bodies, various abilities. Everyone can dance, everyone knows it and knows the possibilities are there. It has opened their eyes.



4.4. About participants' perceptions of dance

Perceptions of inclusive dance depended a great deal, for participants, on where they had entered the training from. Some would know very little about dance in general, but others came from existing dance groups where they already had some experience and knowledge of dance, and familiarity with different dance styles within that.

For established dancers, whether disabled or non-disabled, the experience of this type of dance meant an alteration in their view of a specific type of dance.

“The biggest thing was, especially with the group I worked with this year, their concept of what contemporary dance is or what they viewed it. [It] changed quite a lot over the project, from working with Stopgap and also on the choreography and even on the actual day; I think their understanding of contemporary as a whole and what it could be, and the way that you can work- that was a definite big thing for the group that I had.”

Dance teacher of inclusive group (disabled and non-disabled participants)

“I don't think they realised how open contemporary dance can be. That was quite a big thing which some of them struggled with initially because they were sort of saying to me 'I thought contemporary dance is big leaps and these backflips' and I said 'well actually it's a little bit more about doing something together as a community and being able to choreograph and create a dance piece that we could all do together”

Dance teacher of inclusive group

Some of the preconceptions about what contemporary dance means seem to come from, or be supported by, a limited portrayal of it in media, as well as the lack of experience of the participants due to their age.

“There's a programme on that they all watch called 'Dance mums', but their version of contemporary, that's what they think it is! Also, because they're so young, they haven't necessarily seen contemporary dance companies like Rambert that are doing things a bit more traditionally, so that was really interesting trying to get them to understand that, and also explain it. Actually, I think they didn't get it until the day when they did the performance - and then they got it.”

Dance teacher of inclusive group

Participants who were already regular dancers learned more about Stopgap's style of contemporary dance during the Seafarers project. Sometimes, these participants were sometimes already trained in styles of traditional dancing or styles of contemporary dancing, but this way was new to them. It was more open, more individual, more about everyone together, not like the more gymnastic dance styles maybe seen on tv shows – and it meant visualising the path and the performance in new ways.

One child, for example, wanted to leave as she didn't feel the new choreography suited her. She knew what she wanted to be doing, and she knew she could do it well. She was less confident in this new area and did not continue through to the performance. This could be because she didn't understand the value of this type of dance until after it had happened, and there were sometimes issues around this, and perhaps be limited by her confidence. However, it could be that she simply preferred her own path. Not taking this opportunity could signal that her path will involve being less able to adapt and become part of something that is bigger than what she can already do, but her teacher also acknowledged that this person was already an incredible dancer. She may become a specialist in her own style, and perhaps make other choices in her future as new opportunities arise.



4.5. Conclusion

Seafarers as a project had an effect on perceptions of disability, and particularly of disabled people's potential to become dancers. This was more evident amongst disabled dancers themselves – in practice, learning disabled dancers as there were few disabled participants in Seafarers who didn't have a learning disability.

Changes were less pronounced for non-disabled participants – mainly 14-19 year olds, partly as they started with a knowledge of the 'right answers', - this is also true of audiences and schools. However it is clear from answers to open questions that there are still an entrenched view of disability which follows the medical model and will need more projects like this to overcome.

In terms of non-learning disabled participants and audiences, we find that:

- Numerical results showed strong belief that disabled people can become professional dancers.
- A range of barriers to this were also described, showing that qualitative data does not entirely support quantitative.
- Comments made, and observations from teachers, seem to show that some non-disabled participant's assumptions on people with disabilities could be very entrenched.
- Many non-disabled participants' views were far more positive, and views did show change over time.
- Audiences also shared positive views of disabled people and indicated that their views changed positively.
- The same is true of schools.

In terms of disabled participants' perceptions of themselves, we find that:

- Disabled dancers' perceptions changed more positively, and they felt more strongly that they could become really good dancers.
- The performances were 'transformative' events for many disabled participants' perceptions.
- Disabled participants saw less barriers to them becoming dancers as time went on.
- Barriers were seen as more surmountable.
- Parents views of what disabled people were capable of also changed for the better.

In terms of perceptions of inclusive dance, we find that:

- Initial perceptions of inclusive dance depended on what previous experiences participants had had, and these were varied.
- Experiences and perceptions of dance itself, including contemporary dance, were themselves varied.
- The majority of people learned about and positively engaged with inclusive dance.
- Occasionally, it was not viewed as positively by individuals and could be personal choice.
- Other choices in her future as new opportunities arise.



5. More and stronger networks and connections

Developing the networks for inclusive dance within the East of England, as well as building connections for themselves into the region was a core aim of Seafarers for Stopgap Dance Company. This section explores how the project strengthened existing connections, as well as whether and how new networks and connections were built.

The focus is on the experience of dance teachers, partners and Stopgap themselves, as networks and connections for participants and their families are more appropriately grouped within Section 2 – wellbeing arising from social interactions.

The analysis draws on interviews with dance teachers, with partners and with Stopgap Directors and project staff.

We find that:

- Within the region (Norfolk and Suffolk), there is an emerging network of dance teachers who support each other's practice and feel able to call upon the expertise of Stopgap Dance Company to maintain the level and ambition of inclusive dance delivery.
- Partner organisations are connected into this network, however further steps should be taken to fully join up the dance teachers with potential support and performance opportunities.
- Stopgap's connections into the East of England have been strengthened and broadened to reach a wider group of staff within delivery partners and particularly a wider group of trained dance teachers.
- Stopgap developed their understanding of and approach to building networks which further enabled them to gain access to wider networks across the UK and beyond. This has been beneficial for the organisation itself, but also for the wider dissemination of inclusive dance practice.

5.1. Developing a network of skilled teachers of inclusive dance

As a direct result of the Seafarers project, there is now a network of dance teachers skilled, experienced and confident in delivering inclusive dance training to a high standard. This network provides peer support and shares opportunities.

It effectively builds on existing knowledge, most of the dance teachers said they tended to know others already, but working and training together has deepened the connection and galvanised them to continue to stay in touch. The network is informal and seems to operate based on trust and knowledge, but is already providing some peer support and sharing of practice development ideas:

“As a freelancer, we are all out there on our own doing our own thing; we all tend to know each other because Norfolk's not a big place, it's been really nice to know that so and so's working with that group, we check in and see how they're getting on and see if their choreography's working or whatever, and then you can then do the same sort of thing with your groups. So although we're all working with different groups, you still feel like you're part of a whole. And this has been really nice.”

Alysha Hudson, dance teacher of inclusive group

The things that particularly worked to build this sense of shared practice included the placement of assistants in some of the classes – where needed to support the size of group – which led to both the development of that assistant and an experience of working together which built a strong rapport between teacher and assistant teacher. However, the most important element to support the emergence of a network was the communication between teachers during the project. The teachers valued being able to connect with others as they were freelancers and used to working independently. In order to share and reinforce practice, communication with Stopgap was important but the Facebook group which was set up just for the teachers helped build up more of self-assessing community during the project. This was perhaps even more valuable because different groups did not meet until the end of the project, after all the teachers' input had been done.



“When we had the choreography to then teach to the groups, we then videoed our groups and then shared it just on the group and we can see that so and so’s group is doing that, and they’re at the same kind of level we are, and so you didn’t feel like you were falling behind.”

Alysha Hudson, dance teacher of inclusive group

This informal network is also well linked into opportunities for support as a result of:

- The support and shared experience of the project they all feel confident to call on Stopgap for future support and would like to work on similar projects again
- Their involvement in the project, relationships and projects between dance teachers and Dance East will continue.

Several dance teachers run their own dance schools and are now looking to put the training and ethos of inclusive dance practice developed with Stopgap into use themselves. For example, Dancing Dimensions, previously had a non-inclusive class, but initiated an inclusive dance group in the third year of Seafarers and this is set to continue from September 2019 (see section 3.4), still using Stopgap training and dance syllabus. This shows how a member of the network is able to continue the project’s legacy, within their business model, through the support of a national level organisation.

5.2. Developing links between Stopgap and strategic partners in the region

Stopgap had pre-existing relationships with DanceEast, and to a lesser extent with Norwich and Norfolk Festival (NNF) – two of the key strategic performance organisations in East Anglia. However these were more ad hoc and mainly linked to small pieces of CPD in the case of DanceEast, and performance input to the programme in the case of both. Working on the Seafarers project has definitely consolidated and developed the relationships, meaning more understanding of each others’ work, and thus more trust and respect on all sides.

Seafarers project, in particular working across the three-year span, allowed Stopgap to test and develop a more strategic approach in terms of aligning projects with partner needs. In particular the commitment to produce a piece to be performed by participants at NNF in Years 2 and 3, meant there needed to be thought given to what would work and how to work at a distance to produce a high quality yet fully inclusive piece.

The change in pace between the ambition of ‘Seafarers’ – the show – in Year 2: a single piece bringing all participants together from across the two counties, for one long and creatively ambitious show, to the more mobile and flexible ‘Frippery’ which allowed for separate performances from the groups from each county, and a more mobile show (no scenery, allowing it to be performed right in the middle of Norwich), showed them how to accommodate for different interventions for the differing needs of the two festival years.

The partnership developed well as a tripartite approach, working with keen dance teachers and dance agencies – who wanted to work in this way, but also would see the value for themselves in doing it – along with strategic partners who can support the legacy within the region, whether with skills, or contacts and performance opportunities. This approach, means that only those who genuinely can see the value of an inclusive dance approach get involved. This avoids the risk of partners who might come on board on a short term basis to ‘tick a box’ or get funding, meaning no real legacy is left.

There were was in which these networks could have been, or could still be further strengthened. As mentioned elsewhere, there was turnover of staff during the programme from the Stopgap end, but this was also the case from the NNF end. There are strong connections at an artistic/executive Director level, which have been maintained and built on despite staff changes both ends. There are new connections arising between Stopgap and the Learning and Engagement staff within NNF but these need further work to consolidate following staff changes both ends at this level. In particular Stopgap should ensure that the dance teachers are linked into the Learning team at NNF so that they can benefit from the relationship both ways.

Overall it was felt by all partners to have worked well to strengthen links between Stopgap and the region, and within the region, and to raise the profile, resources and ambition of inclusive dance in the region.



5.3. Developing Stopgap Dance Company's wider networks and connections

This was a particularly important project for Stopgap as it brought together a number of developments they had been working on over the last few years, and also acted as a 'sea change' in terms of size and scale of projects.

Working over three years on one project, with participants involved throughout, at a distance was a new step for Stopgap. It has clearly helped them test and explore what it is about Stopgap's approach that particularly works, but also understand their limitations and how to adapt practice to fit with where they need to work.

Reflecting on what it is about Stopgap's approach which partners and participants responded to, Sho Shibata recognised that the USP of Stopgap – inclusion – is at the heart of what works for them in every way, not just in terms of who they work with, but how they work

“Our USP is definitely true and sincere, in many ways. We are really inclusive, and we will listen to people and engage with different perspectives, so when we do outreach projects or teacher intensives, they do appreciate the company ethos and they buy into it because being inclusive, they feel like they could belong to it, so I feel like that fundamental ethos of the company was probably key in making it work [separate academic research shows] the strength of our inclusive ethos and how all the participants and their parents, teachers also understand our professionalism and inclusivity, but also treating everyone fairly. A key success of all our projects is our inclusive ethos.”

Sho Shibata, Executive Producer of Stopgap,

The experience of delivering Seafarers over the three years has also helped support changes in organisational development for Stopgap, and served as a way of experimenting with and refining ways of delivering different project types. A new outdoor piece, 'Frock', toured this summer and it will be taken to Italy with Stopgap this year, where it will be run on a similar basis to Seafarers but with some crucial changes. Seafarers had a very large impact on a more local scale (around sixty people from the local area participating and collaborating with ten of our professional dancers – Sho) but it is hard to tour work on such a scale. Therefore, the idea was to reduce the scale of the projects in the third year in order to make them more portable as well as local – Frock was smaller, as was Frippery. The aim is now that in taking Frock and Frippery out to Italy over a much shorter time, working with forty disabled and non-disabled local participants from the community over five days working with Stopgap dancers and culminating in a performance on the sixth day. That collaboration and outdoor work would be more intense, far shorter in delivery and more cost effective in delivery, and while the impact of the project would perhaps be less deeply felt (due to the lack of time to build up longer relationships with participants), it would still be very effective on a local level to a large number of participants. This format would then be made available to other outdoor festivals too in the future.

This represents a practical change but also something of an artistic shift in addition – while community collaborative work is familiar to Stopgap, outdoor work is a new development, as is the linking of collaborative work to toured work. It will also be interesting to see how this affects the dynamics of the project – people involved would have to give away more time, but it may be that 'drop off' during the project is reduced, so it will be interesting to see which of the approaches is more 'efficient' in this way.

Further opportunities were also opened up by Seafarers, for example the four star review¹⁰ by the Guardian Newspaper for the 2018 Seafarers show – which is judged (as excellent) as a piece of art, not as a 'project' or 'inclusive activity' really helped raise Stopgap's profile within the arts media in the UK. The outdoor work at Seafarers also included a very positive collaboration and developing relationship with the Moulettes, an art rock band whose music for Seafarers was produced specifically for Stopgap and extremely well received.

Furthermore, after the relationship with Norfolk and Norwich Festival had been developed over the initial two years, and included the outdoor work at Seafarers as part of the project, Stopgap was then able to bid for and access further support and opportunity from 'Without Walls'

¹⁰ See Roy, S (2018) The Seafarers review – a lyrical ode to the ocean https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/may/27/the-seafarers-review-norfolk-and-norwich-festival?CMP=share_btn_tw



<https://www.withoutwalls.uk.com/programme/frock/>, a consortium of festivals which promotes excellence in the UK outdoor arts sector.

The success of the project in terms of levels of engagement of participants, the quality of the production, and the commitment of partners was also seen positively by Spirit of 2012, the funder, and Arts Council England, Stopgap's main core funder, and this will hopefully lead to further networks and potential future projects.

5.4. Conclusion

There were a number of positive connections made as a result of the Seafarers project. Most notably the situation for dance teachers wanting to work in inclusive dance in the East of England has improved in terms of their contacts and networks with each other and with sector organisations locally and nationally.

Stopgap Dance Company has gained new networks both in the region and nationally, and has used their experiences to develop wider international networks for inclusive dance.

There is a need for follow up and further development work to embed the networks and ensure that dance participants and teachers locally have access to professional and personal development routes in the region.



“Uplifting, heartening, co-operative. One of the best things I've seen.”

Response on audience questionnaire from Year 2.

“Absolutely excellent - well done :) Hope you get more funding in the future”

Response on audience questionnaire from Year 2.

“A positive experience. Music excellent. Audience were aching to join in at the end.”

Response on audience questionnaire from Year 3.

“Amazing, polished, inclusive performance, where every member of the team was important and valued.”

Response on audience questionnaire from Year 3.

Audiences at the performances, both Seafarers in year 2 and Frippery in year 3, showed an equally positive response and clearly enjoyed themselves. From observation (performance of Frippery), audiences were enthusiastic and keen to watch. A large group had gathered before the performance took place, and during the performance passers-by stopped to watch it, and then stayed to see more. After the performance, much younger children who had been watching used the area as their own stage afterwards, and played their own game of Grandmother's footsteps.

“I was dying to join in with them!”

Overheard in the crowd at Frippery.

“It was amazing, you were so in time, it was really good!”

Café barista to participant, overheard at Frippery.

The reaction of the audience was noted in interviews with parents and families who had attended:

“There were people standing clapping and I think it had reached out to people in a way...it was a wonderful performance.

I think particularly something like Frippery, which was in a public open space, where people hadn't necessarily expected to watch it - but they were passing by and stopped to watch and were excited by it.”

Parents of participant present at Frippery performance, Year 3.

“I think they were surprised about the scale of it; maybe the second time for Frippery they were expecting it more but the first time I don't think they were expecting it Seafarers to be that big, especially in Great Yarmouth as well, because they're probably used to seeing things like that in Norwich, but in Great Yarmouth probably not so much!”

Dance teacher commenting on audience reaction

6.2. The delivery process

Delivery of the project between Stopgap and the dance teachers and partners involved was generally a successful process and produced positive outcomes for participants and partners along with two highly successful performances. The scale of these community projects was very large, for Seafarers in particular, and was combined with a large distance between the location of the project sessions and the location of the dance company. There were therefore practical considerations around travel for many people involved at different levels



and there were also considerations regarding communication at many levels. The high-quality dance training and the commitment, enthusiasm and professionalism of the teachers delivering it with participants was also essential. The training and follow up, and communication in follow up sessions, were also very important.

“The quality of the performance is down to how well Lucy also all of the Stopgap artists work, how brilliant they are at training the teachers in the first place and [enabling them to] then to be able to create these sections with creative autonomy of their own but also following the creative ideas that Lucy and Siobhan and everyone have given them in the first place.”

Charlotte Mackie

In the Seafarers year, the choreography and delivery of the project was based on a similar project which had already been delivered in another location, so that provided continuity. For Frippery in Year 3, new choreography was prepared.

6.2.1. The experiences of partners

Partner dance organisations and schools often reported that they were impressed with the way the Stopgap groups had been organised.

This came through strongly in comments from the school teachers on questionnaires where they had provided observations to help with the participants' responses. This mostly happened with taster sessions and during Year 2 of the project rather than Year 3. The themes of the teachers' comments were often that the participants had really enjoyed taking part, and also a signal that there had been some difficulty answering the questions. Some quotes gave very positive reactions to the sessions.

“Really well thought out workshop. Routines were broken down into easy to understand steps. Excellent explanations appropriate for the range of students' needs. All students were engaged and joined in with all aspects”

Comment from class teacher after a Year 1 taster session

“The Stopgap company had good interaction with the children, Chloe enjoyed the session.”

Comment from class teacher after a Year 1 taster session [participant's name has been changed.]

Groups taking place during Seafarers and Frippery and the dance teachers leading them were also praised.

“Anna [the group's dance teacher] was hugely skilled in getting everyone to participate. There was enough time to build a trusting relationship.”

Ali Hagger, Operational Manager at Leading Lives

6.2.2. Teacher training and impact on groups

The training was very successful for both years and the teachers valued the learning they received and the development of their skills – see section 3.2. Just as the teachers reported how much they valued working on Seafarers, it is clear that they valued their training and carried it on with them, and were able to make use of it securely in Frippery.

In Year 3, there was a requirement to prepare and deliver new choreography to the teachers, who were working remotely with their groups. There were also staff changes within Stopgap during this time as the project manager for Seafarers had changed and the Artistic Director was on maternity leave. Staff changes, of course, are a familiar event but here several have happened at once and this may have impacted.

In addition, and for various reasons, a number of the partners with groups of participants changed between Year 2 and Year 3. Therefore there had been a deliberate decision to retain the Year 2 teachers into Year 3 to provide more continuity and to enable them to deliver the Stopgap training more effectively to the new participants. All the teachers had new training at the start of Year 3 in and this was followed up with another training session in



April of the following year. Stopgap put mechanisms in place to help embed this training and make sure teachers felt supported.

“We made sure that some of our team were going up to see the groups fairly regularly, at least two times a term, I think more especially closer to the performance, so that the point of that was obviously to check on how it was going but also to continue to empower the teachers to carry on with what they were doing and share what they’d done. Also [to] ask any questions or get any advice or support in areas they were finding difficult, because obviously geographically it can sometimes be challenging to be so far away and the point of those keep in touch sessions ...is then to try and mitigate any problems that might arise from that.”

Charlotte Mackie

Despite this, a few teachers reported occasions where the process of putting training into practice in the third year of the project, and the support involved, needed some amendment. This may have begun from initial misunderstandings at the training session at the start of Year 3, where some teachers came away with an impression not intended by, and perhaps identified by, Stopgap staff.

“[In] Seafarers, we had a much more structured piece to use with our group; for Fripperly we were given the outline, the basic improvisational score. In our training we were given set counts that had to be in it, so from this, we thought it had to be based around these counts. When it came to Creation day, it appeared that it needn’t actually be based so strictly on them. It needed to be a bit more light-hearted and not so rigid, whereas we’d been focused and working on getting all the counts right. There was a bit of disjoint between what we thought we were doing from the training day.”

Dance teacher

This suggests a communication issue at the time of training, but also that the training wasn’t quite as embedded for the teachers as had been assumed – or perhaps a mix of the two compounded by staff changes and the distances needed to travel to them. The teacher above had also acknowledged that there was a great deal for Stopgap staff to do and that it was difficult to work remotely and also felt that there might have been an expectation that the training and ethos of Stopgap had been more embedded in them by then.

“Maybe they thought we should be able to do it more!”

Dance teacher

However, it was a situation that affected the rehearsal process as it influenced what was being taught and learned in classes.

The teachers all mentioned that their comments were made in a spirit of positive feedback and making helpful changes for the future. From some teachers, there was then also a perception that communications were more successful during the first project, where Stopgap were more ‘hands on’ as a result of the more structured choreography in the Seafarers performance (as opposed to Fripperly). Teachers who commented said this about it.

“Lucy was on maternity leave for some of it, so some of us wondered what would happen and who we were going to speak to if we’ve got a problem, but actually if we had a problem, especially like choreography wise as opposed to admin wise, then we knew we could always just ask for a Skype call or just get on our Facebook group – we had a Facebook group just for the teachers and we could just hop on there, and say ‘has so and so got a video of that’ so it did feel very much like you were in it together which was nice.”

Dance teacher

“We had a Facebook group set up for Seafarers as well but we used it more and shared more videos in Fripperly.....I think we had two days for the Fripperly choreography and it felt like a



lot of stuff and they said that, they said ‘We apologise, there’s going to be a lot to do in one or two days’ and so we all kind of left that feeling ‘oh god, what do you do with all of that information!’ So we definitely used it a little bit more in Frippery in terms of ...just getting our head round which group was doing which bit and then how does that work with the other group, and all of that kind of thing.”

Dance teacher

The choreography did arrive somewhat later than the teachers expected and the following quote shows the need to manage expectations.

“I didn’t mind it to be fair, whether that’s just because I’m a laid-back person and quite happy to have things thrown at me, and also one of the things that I from a personal point of view loved so much about working with Stopgap was the fact that we were in it [the production].”

Dance teacher

This teacher also valued the fact that this gave her the opportunity to show her group that choreography doesn’t always ‘nice and smoothly go from one bit to the next bit’ as the group then saw how it was going to be put together into the final performance around a couple of weeks before the performance. As such, the participants learned more about how the process of putting together a production over time could work.

Teachers commented positively on the support they received.

“I have learnt so much from Stopgap throughout both the projects. The visits during Seafarers were a lot more frequent and felt more connected than Frippery. The Stopgap artists were very supportive, friendly and enthusiastic. They would come in to watch and to teach us material and see what we’d been up to and then feedback on that...very encouraging. I think that the process they used in the Seafarers project especially was really efficient in supporting us as outreach dance artists.”

Dance teacher who took part in both Seafarers and Frippery training.

“There were a few different ways that Stopgap supported us and helped us to deliver the work during Seafarers. There was the week’s training at the beginning, and then there were Skype chats throughout and visits from the dancers working in the studio with us, coming up and teaching us choreography, that type of thing.”

Dance teacher

This is linked to a series of issues with overall communication in the second part of delivery which may largely be due to a change in style from the new project producer. There is potential learning around the need to recognise that people new to Stopgap’s work may need more support in understanding what is likely to happen, and how to ask for additional support. As the training and ethos from Stopgap was still relatively new to teachers in a three-year project, it might be that this ethos as a root of all the dance sessions in the project needs a stronger emphasis. This could be highlighted as something underlining every session in each new project (as training for that project happens) and possibly made a little more explicit in delivery. In addition, ‘follow up’ sessions in person to check that training has been embedded correctly for the teachers, and changed into practice as successfully as possible, would lead to a smoother process. This would lead to greater teacher confidence in turn.

Further to this, on communication, while handovers of information in staff changes were completed very successfully, there are occasional signs that the mechanism for sharing information could be improved. For example, one arrangement made for a school group to be established appeared to not have been followed up on while the dance teacher involved believed that it had. That link then had to be re-established and the school then joined later than planned. This underlines the importance of information being securely handed over and also acted upon. This is a result of information being ‘lost in translation’ but due to the circumstances and the



'brokering' of the dance teacher, it has actually led to another moment of legacy for the Seafarers project (as described in section 3.4) as this group looks set to continue.

"Stopgap very sweetly paid me for quite a lot of admin time because I basically had to organise it myself with Stowmarket! But it was great, actually I really appreciated them trusting me to do that because it allowed me to build my own relationship with them, and because I was obviously local I could do face to face meetings with them.

Because that relationship with myself and the organisation, Leading Lives, was so strong, they want to continue and I'm actually applying for funding right now, to continue with them for another year and with another organisation in the town as well. Leading Lives had never had an outside organisation like Stopgap come in and deliver for such a long period of time, every week and with the same group, and the impact on those individuals was so extensive that they were just desperate for it to continue."

Anna Rowe, dance teacher

This could indicate a possible route for running projects in the future. Remote organisation of projects is undeniably difficult, and it could be that if roles and responsibilities were sharpened and developed between an overall project manager and a dance teacher, who could act as a sub-project manager 'on the ground', then the path for communication and delivery could be smoothed.

6.2.3. Getting and keeping groups

As mentioned, some groups could not continue from one year to the next for internal logistical reasons rather than choice or any relationship issues between partners. This could often relate to the systems involved for the two organisations (Stopgap and the partner organisation) and the difficulty of managing communication between them.

One school, for example, was keen to continue the relationship with Stopgap after a very successful year, but a key schoolteacher was promoted to a new role and this meant communication became much more difficult to pin down. A new contact was made through the dance teacher who would have taken that group - she suggested a community-based class who knew her and who were already interested. This meant a lack of opportunity to continue for the original school group, and a judgement call for Stopgap and the dance teacher regarding whether it was better to whether to part ways with this group and start anew, or to continue with the partner (with no guarantees as to whether the same participants or class would be involved with the Stopgap training) and risk the relationship being hard to handle practically.

"They were that tricky age group where it takes quite a while to get to know them and break down their barriers, and then by the end of the performance they absolutely loved it... they really got a lot out of it and said 'Oh let's do it again next year' so it's quite sad not to continue that - but then there was nothing to say that I would have ended up with the same group anyway."

Dance teacher, interview quote

A new opportunity was taken for the community group and also an opportunity to run an inclusive group. This also meant continuity for the working relationship between the dance teacher and Stopgap.

Other issues for continuity with groups related to the way the groups were 'recruited'. Some involved people who chose to attend and were not involved specifically through school, but other groups were formed on a basis of an after-school club. If classes take place within school time, they are a "given" - offered as part of the school day, or as a club, and so have no impact and involve no extra effort from parents - transport home was provided daily by the school, for example. However, when it was anything out of school term then participation was not always guaranteed - perhaps children would be on holiday, or there would be other reasons they would not be able to attend, possibly as this involved a change in perception - it was no longer simply about 'school' and the need for parents to engage with that needed to be facilitated as early as possible. There was often felt to be a lack of understanding of the impact the event could have for the participants.



“Seafarers was in school time, which is partly why we had a different cohort [during Year 3]. We basically recruited within school time and then when it came to after school clubs...parents had to pay every half term, that was their [the school] set up not ours, and we only found this out halfway through when they said ‘Well, we don’t know if he’ll be back next half term because fifteen pounds is actually quite a lot for this family so he might not be there’.

When you’re putting together a performance and you’re saying they might be there next half term, they he might not, they might not be there for the final half term, they might just disappear’ that is quite tricky.”

Dance teacher

This sometimes had an impact on the rehearsals and performance, as some of these took part outside of school time. Parents would need to help their children attend these and sometimes did not see why it was so important to do so (as the children were really benefitting from being involved) until very late on in the process.

This was partly also down to cultural awareness of the families involved.

“We were trying to persuade them that they needed to get them [their children] to dress rehearsals and this was really important, and that actually they were doing this because it was a brilliant opportunity and that got lost in translation a little bit, we really had to talk it up quite a lot; because they had no cultural reference, they hadn’t a clue what we were talking about.”

Dance teacher

Part of the reason for this was that in this particular group, dates for the performances and dress rehearsals were released to parents quite late on, through a communication error between Stopgap and the schools

“I do think maybe communication at the beginning with the parents about exactly what it is because the communication came quite late...so building a vision right from the beginning that we can keep plugging would be good.”

Dance teacher

Ideally, having these dates agreed and distributed very early in the process, so parents know what is coming up and are clearer from the start on why it is so important, is a good idea to have firmly in place for the future.

“Once they’d seen [the performance] they were like ‘woah! That was a really amazing opportunity!’”

Dance teacher

This also shows the change in perception of the families involved – they now had an understanding of the cultural context of the performances and what they can be like, as well as how people could benefit from it and how inclusive dance could work.

Outside of schools, location of rehearsals were mentioned by participants as an issue at times due to transport links to them (so that some participants – who may be living in supported living – could travel independently) or the practicalities of accessing them in other ways – this was also mentioned by some of the dance teachers as groups were often quite a way from their homes.

Sometimes communication with schools were particularly difficult, and communication issues could be about having the information upfront or about having the right people in the loop with all the information. But sometimes there were a mix of factors.

“It was sometimes difficult to manage the expectations [of schools] or communicate; I thought we’d done a good job early on of communicating to all these groups and the schools that they



were based in or the art centres they were based in, what [the project] was going to involve and the benefit the project would be to them, and to their participants but also to hopefully them as an organisation to be able to carry this on.”

Charlotte Mackie, Seafarers Producer (first phase)

On rare occasions, it appeared that despite best efforts, the perception was that regard for the project had changed somewhat, and this was frustrating.

“It turned out that the dates weren’t made clear early enough. The school were not also extremely open and helpful which was a shame. They just kept seeming to put up barriers, we’d knock one barrier down and they’d put another one up and it would be one thing after another.”

Adult working with dance group at a school.

The issue with dates appears to have been down to things getting lost in translation, leading to a ‘massive grey area about dates, between the school and Stopgap and the parents’ (dance teacher comment) but the misunderstanding over this led to some participants not attending throughout the sessions as they or their parents felt unable to continue or to join the performances at particular times. It then also emerged that there was a feeling from the school that the sessions may be too demanding for the children. There was also a sense that the school had not quite realised the scale of the commitment involved, and found that difficult to manage alongside its other priorities and workloads – which can of course be significant in schools – so this may well have had a bearing on the outcome. However, expectations were felt by Stopgap to have been set out very early on, and the perception received was that the barriers were really to do with safeguarding issues.

“The teacher was like ‘we love what the children get out of it but we’re just not sure it’s suitable’. They were really protective - which is great, they have to be protective - but there’s that line I suppose where you’re being too protective and you’re taking away from the experience that they’re going to get.”

Adult working with dance group at a school.

This situation related to expectations in a number of ways, and was especially difficult to manage. Perhaps one way forward would be to create a stronger ‘introduction package’ with video, explanation and other content to help the school fully understand the implications of the project and the responsibilities of all involved very early on, including safeguarding issues, to avoid rare occasions like these.

Where groups did not always continue, it had an effect on participants and also on volunteers, who would feel that they were not able to achieve what they wanted to

“I wanted to have helped more really!”

Aspiring dance teacher and volunteer

Although opportunities in other places were found for those people, they may encounter a similar situation at the end of the project, so it could be quite a significant factor for them.

One thing that has already been referred to is that sometimes participants also did not truly understand what the performance would be like and what it would mean to them until the last stages of the projects. This was likely to be, again, a result of having very little experience of dance, arts and cultural events in the past. Participants were shown video of performances, and told about what it would be like, but this wasn’t the same as living it, and it was a challenge to help them visualise what it would be like. Some suggestions were raised:

“We get the professional dancers in at the end of the project...but maybe if the professional dancers could come in and show off a bit because what they do is really impressive, it might be quite exciting to see.”



Dance teacher

There could be other methods, such as getting a participant one year to film a videoblog for other participants to view. Some of these suggestions have happened in part already, but there could be an opportunity to prepare particular experiences with a greater intended impact for participants earlier in the project to help 'hook' them in from the start.

6.2.4. Delivering the sessions – differentiation

Delivery of dance sessions to the participant groups and the ways in which they developed skills and content throughout the session was closely linked to Stopgap company ethos. This came through via teacher training, in which teachers explored this ethos and learned about techniques and strategies for delivery which supported it.

“Some of the more skilled and ambitious dancers had solos in the shows, and ambitious dance moves to the same choreography. We have this idea of a baseline and...you could repeat that, but other people could start adding complex lifts over the top of it. That was planned over the course of teaching the material. If [participants have] learnt the baseline ...they keep building what they are and aren't prepared to do.”

Stopgap staff

This strategy for helping different people work to different levels was used throughout the Seafarers project and enabled participants of different abilities and skills levels to develop in different ways during the rehearsals. This approach required careful handling from Stopgap and the teachers, and a conscious decision not to consciously or unconsciously place limits on participants' involvement.

“No assumption of what they can and can't do. That's the only way in my opinion to make it truly inclusive but also to develop skills - there can't be a feeling that stops people from progressing, and also there can't be an assumption of what people can do. Like saying 'well this is a low skilled group, so they do that - that may well be true, but if you start with everyone on the same level, it sometimes surprises you how far you can bring someone along.”

Dougie Evans, Producer of Outdoor and Community Productions, Stopgap

This meant a decision not to approach a new group with preconceptions, but to wait for what they bring, and then work with that.

The instructions and language used in dance sessions is necessarily used carefully to support this. One example is of 'open language' which does not specify an end outcome so much but encourages each participant to move towards a goal in the way that suits them.

“If your instruction is 'jump as high as you can' and you're a wheelchair user, then that is meaningless information but if the instruction is 'how high can you go' they you interpret that in whichever way you can.”

Dougie Evans, Producer of Outdoor and Community Productions, Stopgap

This is different from perhaps more 'traditional' differentiation in that outcomes are not set in stone by the participant or the teacher before the activity happens. In some teaching, different levels of task can be given as targets before beginning, and participants are asked to select one that matches. This may well automatically provide a limit on what could be achieved, but also means that participants would have to be very self-aware regarding own abilities in the task in advance. But this is not always possible.

“For some people, if your self-esteem is low and you're someone with disability, if you're asked to work on a self-assessed basis then you might set your own expectations too low for yourself and not develop, and so I think you can't let the participants set the expectations either because they don't know [what they are capable of yet].”



Dougie Evans, Producer of Outdoor and Community Productions, Stopgap

That means allowing people time to develop that self-awareness and get an idea of what they are truly capable of, and encouraging that for individuals using a more open-ended system.

Embedding this ethos in people with less experience of inclusive dance, and of Stopgap's way of encouraging it, can be difficult to achieve immediately. Part of the reason for this relates to different views of what 'inclusive' practice is, and the question can sometimes be 'how can this be inclusive dance if not everyone can do everything in the production?' The questioner sees this as a limit on opportunity and a possible difference in treatment and role for the participants.

The reply to this is that it is key that inclusivity does not involve everyone doing the same thing, and that would involve simplifying everything so that everyone can attain it, rather than enabling everyone get to a different outcome from the same process and doing so without the same expectation for everybody. This is central to the ethos of Stopgap teaching,

Dance practitioners taking part in the training did sometimes find it difficult take this initial training, absorb it fully and then enact it in their own teaching straight away without sometimes needing a bit of guidance and support to help the process run smoothly. This was more to do with how the 'embedding' process happened and not to do with quality of teaching or enthusiasm, but it is very important and so it was well worth providing support for new teachers in order to help them through that. It was worth noting that participants seemed to respond very well when the delivery process for this ethos was truly 'person centred', and allowed them to work at their own pace – it enabled true progress and enjoyment in the sessions.

Teachers often did not have information on which participants had disabilities or of what the nature of these disabilities were; this was often meant starting classes with a completely 'blank slate'. As such, any form of planned differentiation would have been hard to achieve. The 'baseline' dance was worked on with groups, who may stick to it or build on it.

"The routine itself was fairly simple, but actually that worked very well with repetition, reassurance, repetition, and doing something over and over until it became second nature worked really well for the participants as well."

Ali Hagger, Operational Manager at Leading Lives

Teachers were encouraged to, as discussed above, use an entirely inclusive and initially undifferentiated approach which was later refined with individual strategies. One comment was that in some ways there was no differentiation in the way people were spoken to as a class but then there are then allowances made as well, after that initial meeting between the teacher and the participants where it becomes clearer that there are particular ways of communicating that might work for that person.

"We knew that he had ADHD because of little things that he told us about himself but mostly they don't tell us and we don't know, so we just take them on face value and just figure out how their personalities are reacting to any particular situation really."

Dance teacher

However, there were sometimes occasions where it would have been helpful to know a bit more in advance in order to help with communication.

"Sometimes you think it would be useful to know that this person would actually respond better to sign language for example! When we were getting ready to put them on stage for Seafarers, one of the Stopgap professional dancers came in and started talking to one of our participants in sign language and he was responding really well and we were like 'Oh, we didn't know that!'"

Dance teacher



Within a group, ranges of abilities within a class could include people who needed a lot of guidance and those who were very capable dancers and needed the scope to be able to work independently. The latter could be given the sequence to learn themselves and take forward, while others could be guided in a more open ended fashion by saying for example ‘make this shape here, stop still here, and now we move forward’ (dance teacher quote) without telling them exactly how to do it so that person could create their own movements.

Some teachers also spoke of the value of Stopgap enabling them to have an assistant, which helped them to reinforce the interaction between the teacher and the participants and help secure learning. Sometimes this meant they could attend to the needs of different people more easily during the same session, and that helped improve the focus and the speed in which training could happen.

“If I was with one couple, [the assistant] was with another couple and that only left one or two people then sort of stood waiting for us, so that meant we could actually move through things probably quicker than if I’d been on my own.”

Alysha Hudson, dance teacher of inclusive group

Others emphasised the value of peer support and other aspects of co-teaching being a stronger process than teaching alone, and this helping get the most from the dance participants in terms of progress and the energy they brought to the sessions.

“[The participants] get to the point where they’ve heard you say the same thing a hundred times and although you’re still saying it they’re switched off, so if someone else comes in and says exactly the same thing as what you just said sometimes they then listen to it! You just feel like you’ve got a little bit of backup, because if you’re seeing something or you’re sensing that actually they’re only giving you 50% when they’ve got 100% in them, and then someone else also says ‘come on guys, you’ve got more in you’ then they tend to bring it a little bit more if it’s said by someone else.”

Alysha Hudson, dance teacher of inclusive group

6.3. Making the evaluation work for the project and participants

Carrying out an evaluation is always challenging on a long term project delivered at a distance from the organisation’s base. In the case of Seafarers this was made harder through the need to follow funder requirements around some quantitative scoring using nationally validated questions, and the need and wish to ensure that evaluation was appropriate for the groups used.

There are clear learnings from the approach taken:

- The value of considering buy-in, capability and capacity of all stakeholders from the start – including providing training and adapting data gathering.
- The limitations of quantitative data gathering with some participant groups and the need to include other approaches which are appropriate and fit with a social model of disability
- The importance of continued support for evaluation – both in terms of supporting data collection and in continuity of approaches, and recognition of how this needed supporting across core staff changes

6.3.1. Approach taken – gaining buy in and making it fit for all participants

Ruth Melville was asked to put together a framework and support Stopgap Dance Company staff, particularly the project producer for Seafarers, to deliver the evaluation. This was required to follow Spirit of 2012 formats including the use of nationally validated set questions.

The approach taken necessarily was embedded into delivery, as with a dispersed project, data gathering needed to be carried out mainly by the dance teachers who would see the participants on a regular basis. This was also felt to be better in that it would be more comfortable to be asked questions by someone that participants knew, rather than a perceived stranger coming in to ask questions. The project producer was supported in delivery of



the evaluation by having a clear evaluation framework – with timing and data collection templates in place from the beginning.

Another challenge was the fact that many of the participants were non-literate or would find the questions difficult to understand.

As a result of this, a three-stage approach was developed to ensure that the evaluation worked for all groups:

1. A session was held with all core Stopgap staff who were likely to work on Seafarers – this was used to develop the Story of Change that lay at the heart of the evaluation. This allowed an understanding of the approach used, and added buy in from the whole staff team. They in turn could support the project producer and dance teachers
2. Dance teachers were given training in delivering the set questions and also had a workshop session which explained the purpose of the evaluation, they were asked to not only gather quantitative feedback from participants, but also note changes and development in their journals which were designed as reflective spaces for the teachers.
3. In consultation with Spirit of 2012, the core measures were adapted for some of the participants. This was done at the start as there was an understanding that some people would not be able to access the set questions (the required questions from Spirit of 2012 are in questionnaires B in [Appendix 2 below](#)). As a result, an alternative approach was developed using the Canterbury Wellbeing Scale to measure wellbeing, and questions developed within the project to measure perception change. These alternatives (called wellbeing A and perception A) were used for any participants under 14 or who had learning difficulties. For ethical reasons, this tended to be applied at a class level, so people didn't get a sense that they were being differentiated for in this way. These questionnaires, in addition to avoiding any challenging vocabulary, were designed to be delivered verbally or with support, rather than requiring people to read themselves.

Despite the levels of understanding of different participant needs which both Stopgap and Ruth brought to the process, there was a need to finetune the questions around perception further after some piloting in Year 1. This partly arose from a realisation that the word 'disabled' wasn't necessarily understood by all participants – it certainly wasn't by some in the pilot group who ended up in a discussion as to whether it was to do with parking spaces. Furthermore, they in no way associated themselves with this word, despite attending a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties. Following discussion with them where we explained what we wanted to know, it was decided that the phrase "people like me" was the most universally likely to be understood. It was felt that this captured the spirit of what was being measured: i.e. a perception change in terms of aspirations for themselves.

This was more or less successful in terms of being understood by participants for the rest of the programme, but several learning disabled people felt unhappy about what they recognised as a euphemism which they felt challenged the social model of disability. This is a valid point.

"Define 'like me'. If you mean 'disabled people', say that."

Participant response to the statement 'People like me can become really good dancers'

Overall, teachers and staff appreciated the need for robust measurement of outcomes, done partly for internal evaluation and partly for funders. But, as mentioned, methods were not necessarily suitable for all participants. It can be difficult to balance the requirements of the funder in terms of information gathering and methods with the requirements of the respondent groups, and this was certainly one of those occasions.

"The impression I got was that the training we did with [the teachers] at the end of year 1 before they started groups in year 2 made the teachers understand why we were doing it and why it was important. We knew it was a fair amount of paperwork but I think we justified it to them, not only that it was important but to help them understand how they could manage it so it didn't always have to be a burden."

Charlotte Mackie -first phase project producer



6.3.2. Challenges of data gathering from key participant groups

It needs to be recognised that there were serious issues in the validity of the data gathered using the quantitative measures.

Although these are reported above, we have in all cases triangulated this with qualitative data from teachers, parents or participants themselves as we have real concerns about the data as standalone, despite all the work and adaptation discussed above.

Nearly every dance teacher passed on concerns about how well scores reflected reality, and this was noted in the piloting phase by the evaluator and project producer (and changes made though within the boundaries of what is possible):

“In many cases the feelings of the groups weren't reflected in these sheets. Many saw it as a test - the higher they scored the better rather than putting down how they actually felt. A few students also just copied each other.”

Dance teacher comment, Year 2

Despite them being much more accessible than the standard ONS wellbeing B questions, some of the participants found the 'Canterbury wellbeing scales' (Wellbeing a) tricky to use at first. Sometimes this reflected in scores which were 100% across all measures, both beginning and end. For some participants in Year 2 or Year 3, these would remain the same throughout the year, but for others, as they learned to use the Canterbury scales their scores would actually fall as they began to score the measures more accurately. This shows as a drop in the scores, when really it is likely to be that the participants are learning to use the scoring system more finely.

Some schoolteachers reported that children reacted to the questionnaires as if they were a test and felt there were 'right' answers to fill in – despite clear efforts from the teachers to dissuade them of this- and this could have influenced the scores by pushing them higher. Some participants' data was often more nuanced, possibly showing that they were more used to self-evaluation processes in wider school experience, or that their understanding of the assessment system was greater, or that they were less influenced by the feeling that they 'should' say a certain thing.

In some situations, for example where a participant was non-verbal, it was possible for them to indicate their feelings on the visual scales used in the 'Wellbeing' questionnaires, or the scoring sections of the Perception questionnaires. However, the latter also had several questions requiring a written or transcribed verbal response, and these were sometimes more difficult for the participants to access. Teacher input was invaluable at this point. The most helpful and complete example was at Parkside school, where teacher helped by making notes in teacher column to help us get info. This helped see the true nature of participants' reactions to the sessions, often enhancing the detail of their answers but also on several occasions answering from observation when the participant had not been able to answer.

She also indicated several occasions where participants found it hard to answer:

“Support needed to understand the questions. No hesitation in responding once understood. Not able to comprehend Q2.”

Teacher supporting comment on perception questionnaire

Others commented similarly

“I'm sure everyone has said what I'm about to say - some of the questions were very hard and very un-child friendly. The ladder thing [Canterbury wellbeing scale] works because if a child is visual, they can see if it's at the bottom of the ladder then it means this, and if it's in the middle it means this, but just some of the wording of the questions...”

The other evaluation form where they asked you questions that were like multiple choice, like 'always', 'never' or 'sometimes', and 'name three things that you like about dance', that evaluation form - especially for my group because they were mostly able - that one worked quite well. They're quite happy to give you comments, and they're very honest about their



thoughts and feelings.

But if they don't engage with the questions straight away, then I think you've already lost them.”

Dance teacher comments about wellbeing and perception questionnaires

6.3.3. Challenges in fulfilling all the data collection originally designed.

It was recognised by the Stopgap team that although it was great to be supported to carry out the evaluation themselves, it was also vitally important to have an external person coming in on a regular basis to help ensure quality and momentum was kept. This worked well in the first phase of the project when the project producer bought in to all aspects. She had little difficulty in getting feedback from dance teachers and they appreciated the thought given to this aspect – particularly through the teacher journals.

“That was something that [Stopgap] did for us which was actually really useful, they actually created these books. They say ‘session one, what we did, what worked well, the challenges’, little prompts put in there for us which was really helpful, because I find that otherwise you wouldn't have asked yourself those questions.

It wasn't compulsory but we suggest that you do it either the day of the session or the day after so it's fresh in your mind, and also make planning the next class easier in the sense that you have a look, see what didn't work, so then do we try it again or...

Sometimes I'm very factual, ‘we did this, this and this’ - I don't actually think about ‘did that work or not?’ Or if you're thinking that you've got this amazing idea and the kids are going to love it, and then you can tell by their faces that they absolutely hate it - if you've not recorded that kind of stuff and go to use it again, you'll forget that they hated it!”

Dance teacher talking about the use of teacher journals for self-evaluation and reflection

However these were not properly collected at the end of the year (they were given out at the beginning of year 2 of the project – first year of teacher delivery), and furthermore new journals were not given out at the beginning of year 3 due to a decision that they weren't important by the new project producer.

This was a real pity as not only did it reduce the amount of invaluable qualitative data collected, but there was also a lost opportunity to support teachers in their self-reflection.

This reduction in data collection, and unilateral abandonment of key data collection methods coupled with a reduction in regularity of contact with the evaluation support. Teachers also felt that their feedback was less important and it was reported that gathering the scores data from them was less easy.

This is a real loss for the project and considerable effort had to be made post-hoc over the summer following the end of year 3 of the project to make this up.



7. Conclusions and recommendations for future work

7.1. Conclusion

Overall, the Seafarers was a very successful project, meeting all the Story of Change and funder aims, and making a profound difference in the lives of participants, volunteers and dance teachers, and in the strength of the inclusive dance sector in the East of England.

It has offered a massive opportunity for the participants involved – to dance, to take part with others in a shared project, to perform in front of an audience and to take part on the Norfolk and Norwich Festival. It showed successful outcomes and genuine increases in wellbeing plus perception changes for many people.

In turn, it has generated new opportunity in the future This is in terms of leaving a legacy of teaching ethos and enthusiasm which is being followed up by dance teachers and will provide further opportunities for disabled and non-disabled dancers to receive the same benefits in inclusive classes in the future.

7.2. Recommendations

7.2.1. To Stopgap Dance Company:

- Continue to produce work and projects in way which puts your inclusive and warm principles at the heart: this is what enthused and changed perceptions of participants, partners and teachers
- Continue to emphasise the role of excellence within performance and teaching: it is this which engaged and transformed experiences for participants, teachers and audiences
- Your staff and your style are your greatest assets, continue to keep them to the fore and on the ground for training, support and performance.
- Commit more time – ideally at a senior level – to embedding connections and developing legacy networks and partners for the work. These were started with Seafarers, but the full potential hasn't been realised and more work is needed to get the best from the project.
- Continue to develop and improve your commitment to evaluation so that you have the evidence needed to further develop and share practice and secure funding for new projects.
- Work with Ruth Melville Research to produce a way of sharing the findings from this report in a format which is fully accessible to project participants.

7.2.2. For future projects

- Learn from the approach of Stopgap Dance Company – principles and quality of process and product are incredibly important in making work which fundamentally shifts perceptions and ambitions.
- Set up is key: develop strong relationships with local partners who can support and ensure legacy of the project.
- Ensure you select the right dance teachers – with a commitment to inclusive dance, and a wish to be challenged and develop in their work.
- Ensure the training is clear and of high quality. Follow up training with communications, some ideally in person and in rehearsals, to secure embedding of the training and ethos in teachers' practice.
- Be clear with teachers about their role and the expectations on them. Suggestions for practical arrangements to support this – arising from learning from the project include:
 - Have easy communication e.g. a Whatsapp group linking project manager with teachers (frontline delivery staff) and another linking with school/partner staff.



- Have a model 'what to do' or 'guidance' pack eg to establish dates and timescales from the start. This could be adaptable for each location/teacher, for example, project lead could develop a central pack and each could adapt to their location (dates/times, venue, arrangements, contacts etc). The guidance pack should include clear roles and responsibilities of who does what in the project – school, project manager, dance teacher etc.
- Consider location, venues and travel in terms of supporting broad participant attendance, e.g. through lift share systems etc.
- Schools are hard to engage with as partners due to wider priorities overriding dance, and also potential for participants not self-selecting for involvement.
- Effective communication with schools and to parents is vital and can be hard to achieve, consider devolving this to (local) dance teachers to make it more streamlined.
- Keeping expectations high is key to effecting change: Stopgap had high expectations for participants, this helped participants exceed their own expectations and often change their own aspirations for the future.
- Don't neglect the non-dance elements of the class which also lead to positive outcomes: participants enjoyed the social nature of the sessions and made friends, they enjoyed movement and feeling fitter, and expressing their emotions.

7.2.3. For future evaluations and funders

Evaluation was a challenge for a project like this, learning included

- The value of considering evaluation buy-in, capability and capacity of all stakeholders from the start – including providing training and adapting data gathering.
- The limitations of quantitative data gathering with some participant groups, in particular the fact that many of the nationally validated question scales were not at all appropriate for people with learning disabilities. There is a need to include other approaches which are appropriate and fit with a social model of disability. These are often the data gathering approaches which show outcomes most effectively.
- The value of reflective approaches for learning and reflection, as well as evaluation, for example, the teacher reflective journals were very popular with teachers and at least one is using this for her own practice too.
- The importance of continued support for evaluation – both in terms of supporting data collection and in continuity of approaches, and recognition of how this needed supporting across core staff changes
- Consideration of how the evaluation learning can be shared with participants in such a distributed project.





8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix 1 – Data collection methods

Area of report	Seafarers project outcomes from Story of Change	Evidence collected
Wellbeing, confidence, skills, opportunities	<p>Applies to participants and dance teachers in all four areas</p> <p>Improved fitness, happier, increased confidence and self-belief, have fun, make friends</p> <p>Positive wellbeing impact for participants (especially for families of participants, for Stopgap)</p> <p>New friends and support network for participants (for families)</p> <p>Participants better able to participate in the community</p> <p>Improved skills: dance, creative, memory, learning skills, communication skills, focus (participants)</p> <p>Skills, knowledge, workforce development around inclusion; (partners – arts, schools, Moulettes)</p> <p>Knowledge of performance and what is involved, performance opportunity and experience</p>	<p>118 Wellbeing questionnaires completed by participants in dance sessions in all years of the project, and teacher comments accompanying some</p> <p>18 Interviews with participants, families, dance teachers (drawing on reflective journals completed during Year 2), partner organisations, Stopgap staff</p> <p>Seafarers Year 2 and Year 3 evaluation reports submitted to Spirit 2012</p> <p>6 Parent questionnaires completed during Year 2</p> <p>83 Audience questionnaires collected during Year 2 and Year 3 performances</p> <p>53 Dance skills scoring assessments - data collected by Stopgap during Year 2 at the start and end of the year (plus numerous observations in rehearsals)</p> <p>1 Observation at performances by researchers</p> <p>Involvement of participants in dance sessions and performances</p>
Changes in perception of disability and disability dance	<p>Applies to all people involved with Seafarers</p> <p>Change in perception of disability (everyone)</p> <p>Improve understanding of own bodies and movement (participants)</p> <p>Appreciate difference (everyone)</p> <p>Change perceptions of what disabled young people can do, of what inclusive dance is and embed Stopgap philosophy (dance teachers)</p> <p>Change perception of disability (festival volunteers and project management volunteers)</p> <p>Raise aspirations for disabled young people (especially for families and Stopgap)</p> <p>Raise aspirations for selves, build confidence (dance teachers)</p>	<p>118 Perception questionnaires completed by participants in dance sessions in all years of the project, and teacher comments accompanying some</p> <p>18 Interviews with participants, families, dance teachers (drawing on reflective journals completed during Year 2), partner organisations, Stopgap staff</p> <p>Seafarers Year 2 and Year 3 evaluation reports submitted to Spirit 2012</p> <p>6 Parent questionnaires completed during Year 2</p>



	<p>New skills, communication, use of language, inclusive and responsive dance teaching (dance teachers)</p> <p>Understand wider employment options</p> <p>Festival volunteers – employability skills, volunteer elsewhere</p> <p>Project management volunteer – gain specific skills</p> <p>Gain skills in evaluation, raise profile of company, create new partnerships (Stopgap)</p> <p>Talent spot, increase workforce capacity, more creative associates in Eastern Region (Stopgap)</p> <p>Find opportunities to run project in other areas (Stopgap)</p> <p>More funding opportunities perception of disability (Stopgap)</p> <p>Be entertained, engage in the arts (e.g. for wider community of participants), change perception of disability/ability, change perceptions of inclusive dance, change perception of dance (audiences for the Norfolk and Norwich Festival)</p> <p>Perception change (partners – arts, schools, Moulettes)</p>	<p>83 Audience questionnaires data collected during Year 2 and Year 3 performances</p> <p>1 Observation at performances by researchers</p>
<p>Networks and connections</p>	<p>Build stronger networks in the community, the arts sector and with Stopgap (dance teachers in the Norfolk and Norwich Festival)</p> <p>Profile raised, partnership and further projects (partners – arts, schools, Moulettes)</p>	<p>Interviews with teachers, partners and Stopgap</p>



8.2. Appendix 2 – Data collection templates

Wellbeing questionnaire A

WELLBEING A QUESTIONS

NAME: _____
SCHOOL/GROUP: _____

Please mark on these scales of 1 – 100 to show how you are feeling before and after the dance sessions

WELL	RELAXED
Before After	Before After
100 	100 
90	90
80	80
70	70
60	60
50 	50 
40	40
30	30
20	20
10	10
0 	0 
UNWELL	WORRIED
<input type="checkbox"/> Could not answer	<input type="checkbox"/> Could not answer

Canterbury Wellbeing Scales (© 2015 Canterbury Christ Church University)

WELLBEING A QUESTIONS

Please mark on these scales of 1 – 100 to show how you are feeling before and after the dance sessions

FUTURE GOOD	HAPPY
Before After	Before After
100 	100 
90	90
80	80
70	70
60	60
50 	50 
40	40
30	30
20	20
10	10
0 	0 
FUTURE BAD	SAD
<input type="checkbox"/> Could not answer	<input type="checkbox"/> Could not answer

Canterbury Wellbeing Scales (© 2015 Canterbury Christ Church University)

WELLBEING A QUESTIONS

Please mark on these scales of 1 – 100 to show how you are feeling before and after the dance sessions

INTERESTED	CONFIDENT
Before After	Before After
100 	100 
90	90
80	80
70	70
60	60
50 	50 
40	40
30	30
20	20
10	10
0 	0 
BORED	NOT CONFIDENT
<input type="checkbox"/> Could not answer	<input type="checkbox"/> Could not answer

Canterbury Wellbeing Scales (© 2015 Canterbury Christ Church University)



Wellbeing questionnaire B



PROJECT SEAFARERS EVALUATION

WELLBEING:

Please mark your answers to these questions on the 6 ladders over the page

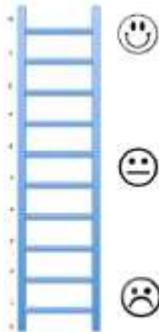
1. Overall, how satisfied are you with you life nowadays?
2. Overall, to what extent do you feel the things in your life are worthwhile?
3. Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
4. Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?
5. How much happier did this event make you feel?
6. I have friends in this group



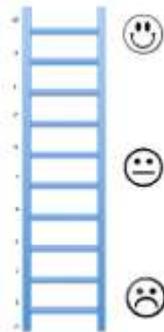
WELLBEING II QUESTIONS 1-3

NAME: _____
SCHOOL/GROUP: _____

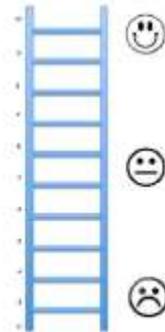
Q1



Q2

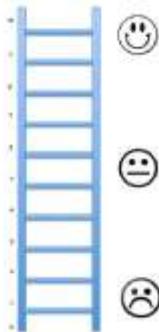


Q3

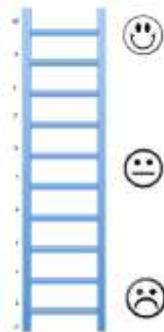


WELLBEING II QUESTIONS 4-6

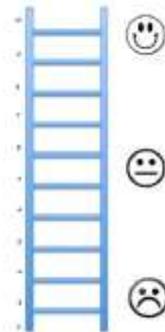
Q4



Q5



Q6





Perception questionnaire A – for Learning Disabled/Young People

PROJECT SEAFARERS EVALUATION (A): PERCEPTION

NAME:
SCHOOL/GROUP:



1. People like me can become really good dancers? Please circle

Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strong disagree

2. Can you think of any problems for people like me to become a really good dancer?

3. What is your favourite thing about dance?

TEACHER COMMENTS:

Perception questionnaire B – participants 13+

PROJECT SEAFARERS EVALUATION (B): PERCEPTION

NAME:
SCHOOL/GROUP:



1. Thinking about disabled people in general, how much of the time, if at all, do you think they can lead as full a life as non-disabled people?

All of the time / Most of the time / Some of the time / Rarely / Never

2. Would you say your view of disabled people was positive or negative before this workshop?

Very positive / Positive / Negative / Very negative

3. When we say disabled dancer what do you think? Write 3 things

4. Disabled people can become professional dancers? Please circle

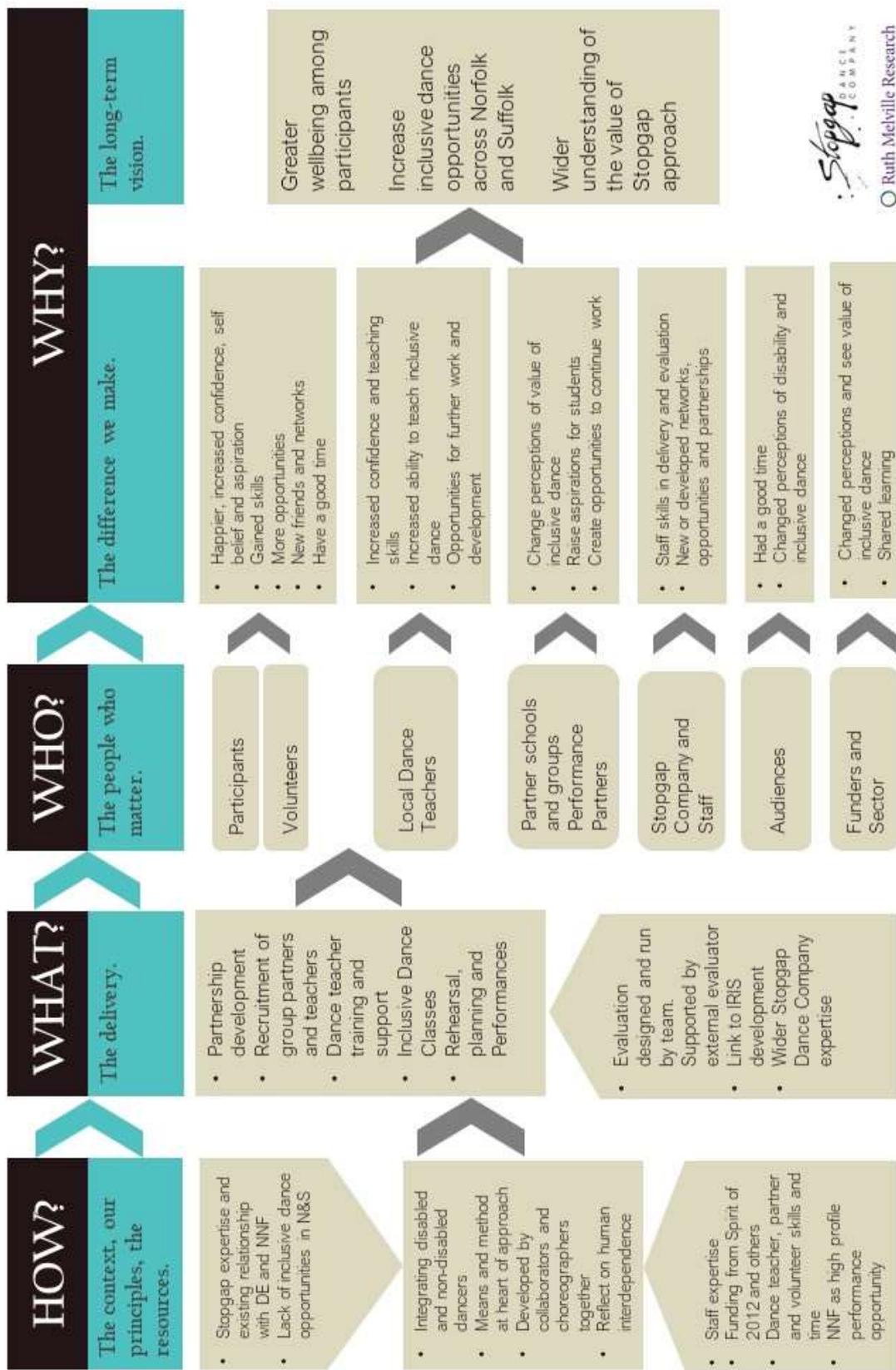
Strongly agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strong disagree

5. Can you think of any problems for a disabled person to become a professional dancer?

6. What is your favourite thing about dance?



8.3. Appendix 3 – Seafarers Story of Change



Ruth Melville Research

Seafarers Project Story of Change: Updated December 2019