**DANCE TO HEALTH**

**A FALLS PREVENTION DANCE PROGRAMME**

Dance to Health combines evidence-based exercise with the creativity, energy and sociability of dance; the core idea behind this pioneering falls prevention programme. The programme was devised and is managed by Aesop, a social enterprise and charity. The sessions are led by dance professionals from leading dance agencies who are qualified in FaME and Otago falls prevention techniques, which improve fitness, balance and flexibility, [https://youtu.be/H73hC_deOY8](https://youtu.be/H73hC_deOY8)

**Older People’s Needs in Norfolk**

Falls are traumatic for older people and a major challenge for the health system. They destroy confidence, increase isolation, reduce independence and impact life expectancy. Falls cost the NHS and social care £4.4 billion annually. Aesop aims to bring arts solutions to bear on health problems. Aesop has a holistic ethos, tackling social and emotional wellbeing alongside physical health. Dance to Health is the flagship model of this idea, beginning in 2015 with a successful pilot programme. Dance has been shown to positively impact people with dementia, Parkinson’s and arthritis. The model was rolled out across six regions in England and Wales: Norfolk, Sheffield, Cheshire, Birmingham, Oxfordshire and Swansea. Now entering Phase Two, Dance to Health is developing partnerships with care homes, councils, leisure centres, charities and the NHS to reach many more older people.

Norfolk has a higher percentage of people over 60 years old in its population than the UK as a whole. In some rural towns this can be as high as 38%. Addressing the specific needs of this group, ensuring they can be active and independent in their communities, is the goal of Dance to Health. Dance to Health launched in Norfolk in January 2018. Since then 309 sessions have benefited 132 participants in Norwich, with six Dance Artists from DanceEast delivering the programme aided by 106 local volunteers.

Dance to Health sessions run weekly in Norwich in three venues: Harford Community Centre, Roxley Hall and Norman Centre. Aesop works in partnership with DanceEast, Active Norfolk, Norfolk County Council, Norwich Clinical Commissioning Group and Age UK Norwich to deliver the sessions, recruit participants, collect data for evaluation and quality improvement, and train and support the team of volunteers.

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– Norwich participant

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– Stella Sheldon, Age UK Norwich Community Outreach Officer

“Dance to Health addresses elements of social networking, strength, balance, cardiovascular fitness and motor learning underpinned with FaME & Otago programmes... this style is very accessible for older, frailer patients who have fallen or who may be at risk of falling. Having such services available widens opportunities and increases accessibility for some of our more vulnerable members of the community.”
– Philip Clark, Clinical Lead OPM Physiotherapist, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital
Dance to Health works closely with DanceEast to find and train the right Dance Artists with backgrounds in community dance and working with older people. Local health partners signpost people at risk of falls to Dance to Health, and some people self-refer after seeing promotional materials. The Dance Artists smuggle the falls prevention exercises into short dance sequences choreographed to music chosen by the participants.

Sessions are fun and social with opportunities to make new friends and reduce isolation. Volunteers partner with people needing specific support, welcome people and organise the sessions. After 90 minutes of enjoyable and varied activity, which targets everything from aerobic fitness to upper body strength, the participants gather for half an hour socialising and refreshments. Dance to Health groups are forming committees with the support of Community Outreach Officers from Age UK to make decisions about their group and fundraise to become sustainable in the long term.

"Being part of a group with a common aim; we all have the same aim, to enjoy the dance and do our bodies good." – Norfolk participant

"Getting involved with Dance to Health has been great. The number of clients attending the groups continues to increase which is a testament that it works and our client group recognise that. We are very pleased with this partnership and are working really hard to make them sustainable". – Age UK Norwich

For more information Dance to Health in Norfolk, please contact

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Participant Profile - Pauline, Norwich

Pauline is a retired music teacher, was a regular dog walker and has done a lot of dancing in the past. Pauline joined Dance to Health because of issues with her upper body. Pauline has arthritis in her back and had a frozen shoulder. She began to feel the benefits quite early on and quickly saw improvements. Now she finds that her daily activities are much easier, including carrying bags of shopping, and she can still do some gardening.

"When I started with Dance to Health, my legs were fairly exercised because I walk every morning with my dog. My upper body wasn’t so good. At one time I couldn’t even lift a cup of tea with my right arm. Now I can lift the teapot to pour the tea out. I can also reach round my back to fasten my bra, which I couldn’t do. It’s all due to the exercise I do now. The best part I think is the social outcome. This group is so friendly, we are so happy and look forward to meeting every week."

Pauline was concerned that Dance to Health would worsen her arthritis but she hasn’t felt any adverse effects. In fact she never has any problems with her back when doing the exercises. She does Dance to Health homework exercises every morning. These make a huge difference to her movement, she generally can’t move too well until she’s done them. She feels so much better now and can do much more.

"I always feel like I have more energy on Thursdays after the class. The dance element is very important to me and is why I originally went and continue to go. When my friends complain about various conditions I encourage them to take exercise or join a similar class."

‘Dance to Health’s emphasis on co-production, building the individual and collective agency of older people, is precisely the approach our future health system needs.’

Joint message from NHS Horizons’ Chief Transformation Officer, Helen Bevan, and Head of Transformation, Kathryn Perera

The only high quality, evidence-based falls prevention programme led by professional Dance Artists – breaking new ground in arts and health.

- 58% reduction in the number of falls amongst participants.
- 96% of participants state they are more physically active after Dance to Health.
- 98% of participants say they would recommend it to family and friends.
- 95% of participants state that Dance to Health has improved their mental wellbeing.
- Improvement of 18% in Timed Up and Go tests and an increase of people with normal mobility.
- More effective and cost-effective than current falls prevention provision commissioned by the NHS.
- Return on investment of £2.89 for every £1 invested.
- Affordable, accessible venues, community support through volunteers and committees.

Impact of Dance to Health