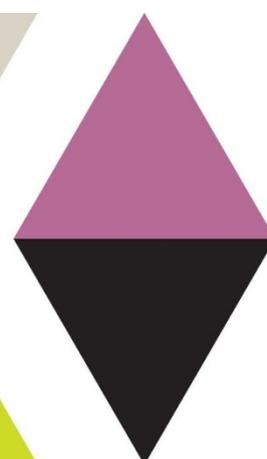
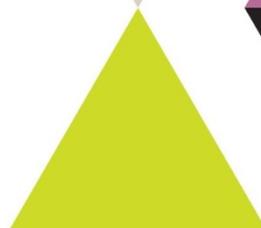
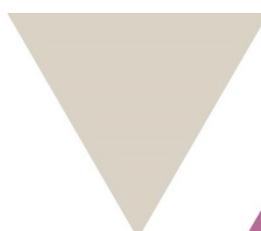


# An evaluation of Falling on your Feet: a Dance for Health programme for people aged 65



**Final Report, August 2016**  
**Executive Summary**

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to everyone who made Falling on your Feet possible, with particular gratitude to the following supporters:

- Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group
- Arts and cultural peers on behalf of the Culture Counts  
(Arts Council England, Quality Metrics reviewers)
- West Denton Community Centre

**With a special thanks to:**

**Falling on your Feet dancers (West Denton) and Nadia Iftkhar, Company of Others.**

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1.2 Context

*The arts and culture sector has an important role to play in our public services. Whether it's improving health and well-being through arts activities which engage people physically and emotionally, or using cultural organisations to build stronger communities. (Slay and Petersen, 2016, page 4)*

“Helix Arts: Falling on your Feet” (FoyF) was realised through an innovative, NHS, Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), funding call, administered by Newcastle Council for Voluntary Services (NCVS).

Helix Arts successfully bid for funding to pilot a dance for health programme for people aged over 65 living independently in the West Denton area of Newcastle upon Tyne. The arts production company produces creative programmes with artists and communities facing multiple disadvantages and has a thirty-year track record influencing improvements in health and well-being.

Over 12 weeks, people aged 65 years and over met twice weekly. An effective recruitment campaign meant the programme was over-subscribed. 38 people registered and undertook taster workshops, with regular attendance continuing at around 18 people attending twice weekly. There were 9 performers for the sharing event, due to prior holiday commitments; two thirds women and one third men.

Each class was planned for about an hour with tea and biscuits at the end, a chance to chat and if interested, with ethical approval and consent, participants were invited to take part in a number of feedback activities that formed the qualitative evaluation of Falling on your Feet with the Department of Public Health and Well Being at Northumbria University who co-designed the evaluation with Helix Arts.

Broadly it focused on the extent to which Falling on your Feet countered social isolation among people aged over 65 living independently and the extent to which the programme helped Falling on your Feet dancers counter fear of falling. The research team had been granted Northumbria University ethics approval ensuring safe and professional conduct of the evaluation and working with the participants' confidentiality agreements.

## **1.2 The Evaluation**

A values based evaluation was guided by Taylor, Purdue, Wilson and Wilde's (2005) practical guide to evaluating community projects, published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Arts and Humanities Research Council 'Connected Communities', values based evaluation framework (AHRC 2015). Both sources advocate a participatory, reflective and ongoing (process) approach to project evaluation, the latter rooted in three questions:

- What's important to the participants (values)?
- Clarifying what's important (why these values?)
- Identifying and mapping values-based aspects (processes and outcomes)

The evaluation wished to find out the views and opinions of those taking part in the dance class, whether taking part in a regular dance class can help promote the benefits of physical activity for those aged over 65 years, whether there are wider benefits and what was of value to the participants and why.

Process evaluation is detailed from within a 'beginnings', 'middle' and 'endings' evaluation capture, as detailed in Sections 5, 6, and 7 of this report. Section 8 offers outcomes evaluation through key findings and their recommendations. These are critically appraised through discussion of the 'Falling on your Feet' objectives. Equally important, this evaluation was also open to being responsive to what emerged from the process.

## **1.3 Findings**

Participants value and know about the importance of maintaining/improving strength and balance in later life and they talk about becoming more fearful of falling as they get older. Falling on your Feet participants, while acknowledging initial 'aches and pains', did not report feeling anxious about physical harm.

Participants valued and recognised the pivotal role of the very experienced professional dancer and choreographer and her support facilitator. They valued acquiring the confidence to find their own creativity and express this through dance. Participants also felt encouraged to be part of a group dance story, each playing to their strengths. These creative aspects seemed transformative. The enormous value and potential of co-production was very much echoed by Helix Arts reflections of the worth of programmes like this.

Participants detailed the challenges of co-choreographing, individual and group dancing and publicly performing. They valued the psycho-social benefits including forming relationships, '*finding oneself*', '*stretching what's achievable*' and not feeling defined, '*just through age*', increasing confidence and overall quality of life. While more women than men took part, the men in particular expressed a need for more opportunities for them to engage with health improving activities that enable emotional expression and release.

As the background literature noted, getting involved in a dance activity may indeed help combat social isolation and loneliness. Encouraging creative and expressive dance may enable those living alone to experience human touch, a need that may be overlooked. In turn this may help tackle emotional loneliness.

The physical, emotional, social and cognitive benefits and impacts gained from Falling on your Feet, reported by participants and echoed by reflections from the artist, creative producer and CEO of Helix Arts are as follows: Mental strength; Short term memory; Muscle memory; Physical strength; Core strength; Posture Balance; Confidence; Decision making skills; Critical thinking / appraisal; Ambition; Shift in identity Being seen differently – by others; cultural capital; Social network expansion.

#### **1.4 Recommendations**

- More research is needed to substantiate potential human and economic gain. Falling on your Feet indicated such an intervention could prove cost effective in relation to maintaining independence and reducing longer term, health care costs
- Falling on your Feet findings suggest benefits in further investigations into the role of dance in addressing emotional loneliness in men – although not necessarily exclusively men
- There should be careful consideration of the skills of the dance professional at recruitment stage to deliver safe practice and to enable 'quite fearful' participants to 'find themselves'
- Interventions like Falling on your Feet may encourage a re-thinking of self-ownership, self-possibility and positive future self well into old age
- We endorse and recommend the value of Falling on your Feet co-produced interventions



## References

Arts and Humanities Research Council (2015) Starting from Values: Evaluating intangible legacies 'Connected Communities' projects, values based evaluation framework. Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Slay J, Ellis Peterson M (2016) The Art of Commissioning: how commissioners can release the potential of the arts and cultural sector. New Economics Foundation.

Taylor M, Purdue D, Wilson M, Wilde P. (2005) *Evaluating community projects: A practical guide*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation