



# Reflectors

Experiences of co-mentoring within dance and disability

The personal stories of disabled and non-disabled dance practitioners working together in a shared learning experience.

Written and researched by Sarah Scott  
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**Potential**  
dance and disabled people

'Overall we wanted to encourage reflective practice, hoping that each co-mentor would gain increased confidence and understanding as a result of having worked intensively with another dance artist.'

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'I certainly feel that this time shared together has allowed us both to take a good look at ourselves and what we do. Over the length of this scheme, I have had the luxury of time shared with a fellow artist, dancer and friend.'



Photo credit: Mark Goddard

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# Welcome

Potential is the Foundation's programme dedicated to dance and disabled people, and was formally established in 2002. Potential aims to increase awareness of and access to high quality professional development opportunities, co-ordinate networking, develop on-line information resources, and above all else to make a positive contribution to the perceptions and profile of disabled people dancing.

The origins of Potential, and the co-mentoring project in particular, can be traced back to 1999 and a research project undertaken for the Foundation for Community Dance (FCD) by consultant, researcher and journalist Annie Delin. The research report, *Do Dancing*, reviewed opportunities for disabled people to dance in the East and West Midlands, as a participatory arts experience, for recreation and as a career choice.

This report highlighted the value of peer-learning opportunities and 'exchange', in supporting both disabled and non-disabled dancers with artistic and creative development, exchange of expertise, and knowledge and understanding of context. To this end, the Foundation for Community Dance developed a co-mentoring programme for ten disabled and non-disabled dance practitioners, and promoted this as a professional development initiative of Potential.

We are pleased to publish *Reflectors*, a collection of reflections by participants in this co-mentoring programme. Our intention here is to reveal process, outcome and impact through the voices of the participants themselves.

There are many people to thank for helping make Potential and this co-mentoring programme a reality, in particular Sarah Scott, Sue Williams, Sue Akroyd and Emily Horwood for their guidance, skill and support, and to Arts Council England West Midlands and the EQUAL programme of the European Social Fund for their financial support. Thanks also to the ten co-mentors for giving so generously of their time, and allowing us to recount to you their experiences of co-mentoring.

We hope you find *Reflectors* both encouraging and inspirational, no matter what your professional role or ambition, and that if you have been thinking about your own professional development – or helping support that of others – this sharing of our experiences helps you to reflect upon your own experiences: past, present and future.

**Chris Stenton**  
Foundation for Community Dance

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## 4 The wider context: dance and disability arts

The current definition of disability arts is: 'art created by disabled people which reflects the experience of disability'. Disability arts initially found its voice through song, music, poetry and comedy, 'our words about us'. So, in the past dance has sat somewhat awkwardly within the frame of disability arts; it was more often associated with arts therapy. However the last fifteen years or so have seen dance and disability emerging from the wrappings of 'therapeutic activity' – a positive progression – but there is still further to go.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has contributed to a shift in perspective and experience. The fabric of the disability arts sector and all who move around it seems to be changing, with a greater appreciation of the diversity that exists within 'diversity'.

Many disabled people who want to dance are not aspiring to the mainstream dance agenda: they simply want to move to express themselves creatively, and be respected for this. For some disabled dancers, their ambitions are absolutely mainstream and driven by a different set of politics. Many non-disabled dancers and choreographers are genuinely inspired by the rich creativity that different ways of moving provides, indeed they enjoy being challenged by disabled dancers who bring their own specific experience in dance.

The debate that runs through all this helped to ignite the Potential initiative – which seeks to build bridges to help span the divides between people, places and perspectives.

**Sarah Scott**

## Co-mentoring as professional development

Continuing professional development is thinking about yourself and your professional growth. It's about enabling you to become more effective, articulate and successful wherever you work in dance. It is based on the principle of valuing yourself as an individual and finding the right learning experience, identifying what you need for your progression, why you need it and in what way, where to get it and what to look for.

Co-mentoring, as a form of continuing professional development, is a collaborative way of learning. It moves

away from the traditional relationship of mentor (teacher) and mentee (learner) to become an equal exchange between two practitioners. Both individuals develop through a dialogue of ideas, questions and thoughts, thereby gaining, as well as offering, knowledge, skills and experience.

**'Co-mentoring...  
is a collaborative way  
of learning.'**

# About the Potential co-mentoring scheme

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We designed the support structure for the co-mentoring scheme after consultation with arts organisations who were already running mentoring (though not co-mentoring) schemes, particularly those involving disabled artists. Other people's experiences told us that we needed to have certain things in place: induction, Disability Equality Training (DET), third party support, a written agreement, training bursary, expenses budget, budget for access support and a method for 'closure'. We drafted a framework which incorporated all these aspects.

We worked with disabled arts consultants Sarah Scott and Sue Williams, both of whom are experienced in professional development and mentoring schemes. As facilitators and advisors they were involved in the planning and delivery of the scheme which ensured that the balance of leadership and management of the project reflected the nature of the group and the aims of the scheme. Sarah also provided dedicated 'third party' support to the co-mentors alongside the administrative support of the Foundation.

As individuals and partnerships the co-mentors set their own aims, organised their own time and decided on their preferred way of working. Thus the responsibility lay with the co-mentors themselves and towards each other to 'make it work', though Sarah was able to support them in doing this.

The DET gave a shared reference point for disability equality issues and served to partially reinforce the understanding of those involved that this was to be an equal relationship. We didn't want anyone to assume it would be the disabled person doing all the learning and wanted each individual to feel they had something to offer as well as something to learn.

Overall we wanted to encourage reflective practice, hoping that each co-mentor would gain increased confidence and understanding as a result of having worked intensively with another dance artist.

This publication provides an illustration of what co-mentoring can be. As you will see from reading about the co-mentors experiences you can't predict what will happen and you can't prevent some things from going wrong but by having a strong support structure in place you can hopefully give this the best chance of working and provide a beneficial learning experience.

**Emily Horwood**  
**Foundation for Community Dance**

Photo credit: Sue Akroyd



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## Whose voice?

How is it best to relate the experiences of five pairs of co-mentors, each pair formed by one disabled and one non-disabled dancer, all from very different backgrounds, and all coming from the dance rather than disability arts perspective? They are dance artists with very diverse levels of skill, experience and professional development.

'A story emerges of what happens when you bring people together.'

How to capture an essence of the small, yet significant and sometimes delicate journeys they took together and individually during the process of this co-mentoring project? We think it is best that you hear their voices.

In talking to each person, asking specific questions one to one, a story emerges of what happens when you bring people together: an honest and upfront collection of expressions about their co-mentoring experience reflecting the culture that they are in, through their voices and in their words.

Photo credit: Andrea Testoni





Photo credit: Paul Calver

## Introducing the Co-Mentors

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### Marc Brew

I was an active child, always doing tumblers and rolls trying to fly like superman. With all this energy and acrobatic skills my mother decided to put me into dance class.... I found my outlet and an activity where I could express myself. After acquiring a disability while working professionally as a ballet dancer I didn't know what to do next. I told myself that a dancer couldn't dance using a wheelchair, as through my life experiences and training it was unheard of. I searched within for my true belief of what a dancer is and what is dance? I felt that dance is about expressing oneself, so the fact I was in a chair didn't matter, I could still find ways to express myself, it may be different than before but I can dance. Disability might diminish opportunity but not talent: for the last two years I have been dancing with CandoCo Dance Company.

### Marc worked with Tom Sapsford

My child minder's daughter, who was my age, used to go to ballet and I tagged along. I trained at the Royal Ballet school, joining the Royal Ballet Company at eighteen where I performed a wide variety of classical roles, made pieces and was awarded a Jerwood Foundation Young Choreographers Award. A few years ago I decided to go freelance and have since worked with choreographers including Siobhan Davies, Mark Baldwin and Wayne MacGregor, made work that has been presented – amongst others – by The Royal Ballet and The Royal Opera House, The Fringe Festival of Independent Dance Artists in Toronto and Dance Umbrella, appeared in two feature films and even a fashion show.



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### Thomas Clark

As a non-disabled person I had a career as a mechanical engineer. It wasn't until I became disabled that I participated in a dance workshop. In 1999 I became a student on the first fully inclusive HND Performing Arts in the Community course at the University of East London. I have since worked as an inclusive dance artist at schools within the East End of London. As a fully trained co-deliverer of People Moving, a one-day programme run by East London Dance, I provide training for practitioners around inclusive provision in dance. My performance work has included working with Protein Dance, Physical Recall, Tardis Dance Company, Debacle Theatre Company, East London Dance Integrated Dance Company and Leap of Faith dance company and also in a dance film for Channel 4. Currently I am co-mentoring with Rachel Bradbear at Middlesex University on adapting Humphrey Technique for wheelchair users.

Photo credits: Paul Calver (above) and Dan O'Neill (above right).

### Thomas worked with Ann Dickie

I started dancing at the age of three in Coventry, moving to London to study dance full time aged seventeen. I knew even then that that I would spend my life as a dancer. I trained at the Nesta Brooking/Roger Tully Studio combined with courses at the London School of Contemporary Dance. I taught contemporary dance at the University of Geneva and danced with companies in Zurich and Cologne before joining Ballet Rambert. I went on to perform with Mantis, Second Stride, Gateway to Freedom, Imminent Dancers Group, and YB Dance. I co-founded Lurching Darts Dance Company and later worked as an independent dance artist. I founded, direct and choreograph for the From Here To Maturity dance company, and lead dance workshops for people of sixty plus; I have led the older persons group Leap of Faith at East London Dance (ELD), and taught on the CandoCo pilot foundation course. My work opportunities are increasing as I approach my 60th birthday.



### Sally Edwards

As a result of attending a CandoCo residency in Shrewsbury, I became part of a community based dance project and things continued to grow from there. I am a founder member of Blue Eyed Soul dance company and have performed extensively throughout the UK and abroad in Switzerland and the USA. I play an active role with the company's outreach work, running community based open workshops in Shrewsbury. I am also studying for a BTEC Diploma in performing arts. I believe that dancing is not my job, but my dream and destiny. I love to perform and teach as it gives me the chance to spread the joy of dance to others, which I see as a real privilege.

### Sally worked with Andrea Buckley

My earliest memory of dancing was when I was three, performing an Irish dance at a social club in Liverpool. From then on I just didn't stop - from ballet and tap to gymnastics and disco dance I grew up dancing in the shower, making routines in the living room and performing in many different public places. At the age of sixteen I studied at Laban. Since then I have worked with many eminent choreographers on the British and international scene. As an independent dance artist I perform, teach and create work in various professional contexts in England and abroad. As a teacher my work draws upon my extensive range of improvisation and contact skills as a way to continue to expand my interest in dance.

Photo credits: Arnim Freiss (below), Paul Calver (below right)



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## Aislinn Lewis

I started dancing aged sixteen as a student at the National Star College, Cheltenham in Gloucestershire where I undertook a BTEC in Performing Arts; within this there was a dance module and the chance to do workshops with CandoCo. Adam Benjamin led a workshop with the performing arts students and some members from Gloucestershire Dance. From that Velcro dance company was created and has continued ever since. We devised work with Sue Smith and Kuldip Singh-Barmi of CandoCo and for the past seven years we have worked with Pietro Cardillo. Velcro perform in various places and run weekly workshops for people in the Gloucestershire area.



## Aislinn worked with Elisa Sullivan

As a member of my high school dance club I was encouraged to apply to Middlesex University, where I completed a degree in Performing Arts. Subsequently I danced with various fringe companies before joining Carlson Dance Company in Wales. Following a back injury I returned to Liverpool and became office based: I was not happy! I was then invited by choreographer Pietro Cardillo to do a project in Poland that introduced me to integrated dance. From there I moved to Cheltenham and performed and created work as part of Gloucestershire Dance. I found through integrated dance a way to take my performance and choreography to another level of pure truth of body and soul and I hope that in some way this is expressed in my work.

## Michael Mitchell

I came to dance after I broke my neck in 1983. My interest was driven by the passion to understand movement from the inside out. I then had Zen training and began to teach a contemporary form of Sattipathana which looks at conscious movement in everyday activity. Most of my work is within education and community contexts in the South West region. I have facilitated inclusive dance projects including Breath & Balance and Sculptured Space, and recently performed at Holton Lee, Dorset and The Arc in Trowbridge. I am an associate artist with Dance South West and REACH Inclusive Arts, and am the only disabled dance artist currently running my own company, Dance Aware, in the South West. With Dance Aware I explore sensing boundaries and develop themes which look at disability issues.

## Michael worked with Sue Smith

I am an independent dance artist based in Plymouth. After graduating from Northern School of Contemporary Dance in 1992 I became a member of CandoCo Dance Company working with choreographers including Emilyn Claid, Siobhan Davies, Guillem Bothello and Annabel Arden/Jos Houben. I was Schools Officer for the Council for Dance Education and Training 1999 - 2002 working in collaboration with vocational dance schools. I became Associate Director of CandoCo in 2003 and have choreographed for Company Pyke and CandoCo Dance Company. My last work, mooching, was performed at Tate Modern, Sadlers Wells front of house and Broadgate Arena and also toured to outdoor spaces in Devon. Recent work includes dance film, web based and outdoor performance projects. I have worked closely with CandoCo Dance Company on the development of the Foundation Course.

Photo credit: Paul Calver





Photo credit: Paul Calver

## 12 Michael King

I came to dance following a climbing accident ten years ago resulting in partial paraplegia and a focus on what really gave me pleasure in life i.e. dance. I had always loved dance but didn't have the confidence to pursue it before the accident, (northern lads don't dance!). My dance experience has included training with CandoCo, professional development with FRONTLINEdance company, which I co-founded in 2000 and performing with Blue Eyed Soul dance company. Recently I was one of four professional disabled dance artists selected to work with Janet Smith and Scottish Dance Theatre on research and development for a new piece for the company.

Much of my work includes directing physical theatre projects for young people and I have recently been appointed as Associate Director of Half Moon Young Peoples Theatre, London.

Unfortunately Michael didn't get to have the co-mentoring experience he had hoped for. It became too difficult for his original co-mentor to take part in the scheme due to his heavy workload. A second co-mentor was found but then became seriously unwell just as they were about to embark on their experience.

In some instances people decided to co-mentor with someone they already knew and even had previously worked with. In others, the skill that was being sought was beyond their immediate dance world, so they were willing to enter into a co-mentoring partnership with someone they'd never met, but perhaps had heard about.

Anne: 'I met Thomas when I was teaching the 'Leap of Faith' group for ELD about two years ago. I had no experience of leading integrated classes when one term Thomas, and also a dancer with learning difficulties, arrived to join. I felt challenged by this new development and requested support. ELD responded by putting me on a course run by Jo Parkes 'People Moving'. Thomas was a Learning Support Assistant on the course and, as he was no longer coming to my class, we had the opportunity to renew our contact in a different context. He later joined 'Leap of Faith' and told me he was interested in learning ballet, so I offered to teach him. Later that afternoon he heard of the co-mentoring project... good timing!'

Aislinn met Elisa when they were both dancing and working for Velcro in Gloucester about four years ago. 'I wanted to co-mentor with Elisa because when I was working with her I thought she was an excellent dancer and I liked her style.'

Michael Mitchell wanted to understand what's involved in setting up educational programmes and to go along to workshops and performances. 'I was interested in the educational side of dance and how it changes people's perspectives, changing people from the inside. Celeste at CandoCo recommended that I approach Sue, though I had never met Sue before. I like people that keep my feet on the ground; I need someone to pull me up short; I needed someone more direct.'



Photo credit: Nick Gurney

Sally: 'Andrea and I had met each other at various workshops and events on contact improvisation and over the last three years have built a friendship. FCD contacted me and asked if there was anyone I wanted to work with and co-mentor.' Andrea 'had experience of working with people with learning disabilities and wanted to extend this into a broader aspect of working inclusively. So when Sally approached me I was keen to take up the opportunity'.

Michael King said, 'I'd worked with my proposed co-mentor before and had found it to be the most challenging and rewarding experience. I wanted to work with him again. However, I had picked a busy person and despite good intentions and endeavours we never could get to meet'.

Marc said 'When I was approached via CandoCo I knew that I wanted to co-mentor with someone who was interested in choreography, someone of my 'calibre'. The fact that both Tom and I had a background in classical ballet was important and relevant to us both, and was what brought us together'.

# 14 What I wanted to gain

Some pairs were extremely clear and others more flexible about what exactly they intended to get from co-mentoring. Stating aims in the co-mentoring agreement certainly helped to keep the focus on what they had planned. Whatever their aims, most partnerships decided to use their time together talking and sharing as well as taking some practical time in the studio.

The focus of Aislinn's time with Elisa 'was on increasing my insight into dance, researching ideas and stimulus, and practical choreographic sessions to develop my confidence in choreography'.

Sally 'wanted to investigate dance technique, to deepen my understanding of what it is, and explore how it could be developed to fit my own physicality'. Initially though, Andrea was 'unsure about how to 'read' and 'translate' Sally's work in keeping with technique. I felt Sally had enormous drive and energy and was really going for it. Eventually, as we worked together finding creative solutions, listening and not judging each other, we found a settling place.

**'As we worked together finding creative solutions, listening and not judging each other, we found a settling place.'**

Creatively I learnt a lot, Sally wanted to travel across the floor, and half way through our process I got excited and wanted to find out how it could be made possible. Early on it was a block that threw me, but now it has evolved and I can see how I could creatively explore this...'

Sue held 'stimulating face to face and phone meetings with Michael, during which we challenged each other intellectually and conceptually. This scheme provided a space for good artistic conversations around issues of

inclusive dance practice, education, choreography and dance on film'. Michael said 'Our meetings were quite intense. It was more intellectual. We discussed the approaches to movement and how that was contained in an educational context. I would have liked to have done some practical work'.

Tom and Marc both wanted to explore choreographic practice, the process, opportunities, and production. 'Marc had the opportunity for a practical session with CandoCo to which he invited me, this spurred the partnership into gear as we were immediately working practically.'

'We then looked at how the system works in terms of grants for the arts etc, and getting surgeries, and general arts development. We attended a performance of Pina Bausch and Tom gave detailed feedback on my rehearsals for my work Upside Down and Back to Front, which was part of Resolution! at The Place.'

Tom: 'When we held a post performance meeting, we looked at the reviews that had been written about Marc's performance, all of which mentioned that he is a wheel chair user, so we discussed how this affected objective criticism. Marc worked on a choreographic idea with me, to explore new ways of movement through space, he assisted me on a dance piece that I had been developing over the year. I have made a five minute show reel of all the video footage that we filmed during the co-mentoring phase.'



Photo credit: Phillip Kamerer

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'It's very strange, because a co-mentoring relationship is quite intimate but you need to maintain distance to be able to say its not working for me!'

## Are we dancing on the same floor?

There's no question that co-mentoring brought varying degrees of challenge for all involved. Much was provided in the way of initial guidance, but then each co-mentor had to be responsible for their own direction. The 'enclosed' space that this provided was an opportunity to develop awareness and real experience of different levels of needs and how to respond appropriately.

'My co-mentor was constantly reminding me that I was making a contribution and they weren't the boss. I was thinking they had vastly more experience of dance – what am I able to contribute? They reckoned I had insights from the grass roots, I had done movement work for fifteen years, which is different.'

'I had some uncertainty around accessing my co-mentor, I found myself wanting to be more helpful and yet realised that to be so, I had to respect my partner's space and leave her to it. Creatively, I felt that at first I was the one suppressing all her ideas, and found myself wondering 'how can I empower you without actually being the one to empower you?' Yet I was aware that there was a facilitating role I could take. To start with I played it safe, until I developed my awareness of 'independence'. The word 'diversity' is so true, as it IS diverse because of people's varying needs...there's a lot one presumes about a situation.'

'In spite of assurances from my co-mentor I found it very difficult to find an equal balance within the relationship, as I had a major sense of taking, rather than offering a lot. I still felt it was mostly one way, I could have done better, I could have been more confident...'

'I had to keep reassuring my co-mentor that their experience and opinion was valued, this became frustrating as it got in the way of the relationship.'

'From the start we 'fell into' a mentoring relationship as opposed to one that was co-mentoring, perhaps this was because we had known and worked with each other for several years previously so our pattern for relating was already set. Towards the end of our time together though I became aware that some exchange had actually, naturally taken place.'

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'I have never been in an equal setting before in my life, I've always been in a situation of being told what to do!'

'Had it not been for the co-mentoring project, for me, there wouldn't have been such an open and frank exchange with a wheelchair user.'

'There's not always going to be an even exchange, we had times when it was uneven and then times when the 'balance' was felt.'

'It made me realise that we don't always know what someone needs and reminded me to be open to what different people need.'

'There were moments like for example when we were rehearsing in the Royal Ballet studios, I noticed how people looked and reacted to me, I felt I stuck out like a sore thumb, this must have been the first time they'd seen a dancer using a wheelchair... had to be a step in the right direction!'

'Its very strange, because a co-mentoring relationship is quite intimate but you need to maintain distance to be able to say its not working for me!'

'In the studio it was about creating work with the body you have. My co-mentor worked me hard, he challenged me! Its not often I have the experience of someone wanting to choreograph on me specifically.'

'It made me realise that we don't always know what someone needs and reminded me to be open to what different people need.'

Photo credit: Paul Calver





# I didn't expect that!

The unexpected can bring both positive and negative experiences. Several of the co-mentors were surprised to find that certain boundaries blurred, even though the induction day provided guidelines around the issue of establishing and maintaining appropriately agreed boundaries. A couple of co-mentors were more open to being flexible, to 'go with' whatever the co-mentoring phase manifested. Others discovered that there's a danger in having high expectations, fixing on them and by doing so missing the 'exchange' that has actually taken place.



Photo credit: Sue Akroyd

'I didn't expect... what we ended up doing. I had a very clear interest in exploring dance technique but this was not compatible with where my co-mentor was coming from, so we ended up investigating techniques around contact improvisation. It provided a common language base from which we could work, as we both had experience here.'

'I had not expected to do what we did and we did so much. It proved to me that anyone can follow the principles of ballet technique, there are huge misconceptions and the challenge is to find suitable ways of adapting the technique, it was very unexpected and exciting. I found it very inspiring because he's so talented, if there were expectations we went beyond them, because our rapport is good.'

'I didn't expect that I'd become good friends with my co-mentor.'

'Anything unexpected?...having my perspective of things challenged, particularly the way I put them into words. My co-mentor has got very sharp ideas of inclusivity. I would have said that my ideas are inclusive and embrace diversity and that is housed in my vocabulary. It is helpful to use the whole body, identify with it. She gave me alternative routes. I thought in my experience at the time, that I was (embracing diversity), but it's beneficial to move your range of experience and areas. We were challenging current ideas. We both challenged one another's point of view. Trusting where we are both coming from – to maybe dissolve old ideas and bring new ones through.'

'I expected a more personal exchange.'

'Not only did I not expect to never get to meet up with my first proposed co-mentor, but I certainly did not expect the second to suddenly fall ill just as the co-mentoring phase was about to commence!'

'I didn't expect the generosity of the person – to share so much – often there's a lot of competition in this field, but in working with my co-mentor I found him very open with loads of experience and knowledge, and I didn't feel judged by him, even during the feedback session. This was very constructive.'

# 18 Where did the dance take us?

This pilot scheme was intended to test whether co-mentoring is an effective mechanism for professional development and a beneficial way of sharing knowledge and experience between disabled and non-disabled practitioners.

'I am more confident about being instructive, I have more confidence generally. I have started to choreograph a piece on paper, putting down ideas and pictures and found a dancer/teacher who is keen to work with me in this development, which will include working up a proposal to the Arts Council.'

'I felt able to accept the invitation from CandoCo to teach on their Foundation Course because I knew that I had the support of my co-mentor. This co-mentoring experience has been very relevant to my professional development, as my main thrust of work is with mature students professionally and in the community, and with that comes a changed physicality, which provides the opportunity for different approaches to dance. Chances are I'll employ a disabled dancer in the future.'

'I gained an appreciation of the importance of good organisational skills, time management and communication skills. It was a very exciting opportunity, to be able to work in a studio with

someone you've chosen, to come together from different professional backgrounds and find a movement vocabulary from which to work and learn from each other. Having said that it didn't meet with my expectations, I was disappointed to have to drop my plan, but at the same time it was a positive learning experience and has made me more certain it's the area I want to focus on.'

'We had good communication based on respect for each other's work and experience and we definitely connect creatively. He gave me a lot – I learnt a lot, he's an excellent teacher. I have some understanding of how to transfer ballet technique to a disabled dancer, to implement the technical principles and to adapt – I have a different approach.'

'The very fact that this was a co-mentoring project made me ask myself more questions around my approach to it, and getting the balance right. It helped me to reflect on what's my way of working inclusively, what is my teaching practice.'

'I've learnt about leading a class or workshop, delivering to a group, getting into the mind of a non-disabled artist to identify their fears in teaching disabled people; and it has opened my awareness and understanding of ballet. Since we started I have been supporting a teacher in a class of Year 1 degree students in the Humphrey Technique. This has brought me to allow non-disabled people to use my wheelchair which gives me support, as someone else in the class needs to remember the moves we set.'

Photo credit:  
Siân Jones





Photo credit: Paul Calver

'The whole experience gave me confidence because it has made me look at things a different way...'

'Prior to this I had made the decision to leave the dance world, to stop dancing, so it felt particularly meaningful for me now to have been able to share and pass on my knowledge and experience to my partner. Also, from a choreographer's point of view, I have come to realise how clear you have to be if you are a disabled choreographer, there is a very real need to be very focused and sure of one's instructions.'

'I have appreciated the time and good opportunity that this has provided to look at my working life objectively. At the same time it has given me practical experience, and I feel I have confidence that there's no longer an issue there, the difference is not as large as I thought. My overall awareness around access generally has been affected.'

'I've learnt about applying what I know into a completely different context, and I can share my work with someone I didn't know at all and invite feedback.'

'The whole experience, or rather the lack of any co-mentoring partnership taking place, has taught me persistence! More seriously though I have also come to

appreciate the value of improving my own means of communication. I have learnt too from observing the other pairs of co-mentors, and found it inspiring that they have found ways for 'transitions' to take place.'

'Having gained more information and a greater knowledge about the arts world in London, I am now working on opportunities as an independent artist; Tom was good about introducing me to some useful people in the dance world.'

'The opportunity to work practically with CandoCo during my partnership has forged a connection with them, it was through these opportunities to get into the studio that I felt I have learnt the most.'

'I acquired teaching skills and an insight to building a degree programme. She gave me an insight into formal things, the tools of the trade if you like. I think I have more confidence about directing movement and I gained some feedback on who to approach, contacts. I gained an appreciation around not doing things 'to' people but 'with' people; in the past I had a more therapeutic approach and now I am more attentive to not making a change to someone, to allowing them to 'be' and accept who they are.'

## 20 So is this the end?

Co-mentoring has taken some dancers through a learning journey from which they need to emerge and move on. However for others, it is just the beginning of collaborative exploration and creativity either independently or with their 'ex' co-mentor.

'I'm going to video a duet that I had developed prior to this with another dancer. I also intend to complete the dance piece using the teaching and choreographic plans that I have been working on throughout the process and Elisa has offered to support me when she can.'

'It gave me a taste of further partnerships, good leaders. I like to go hand in hand – in the past I have been a lone wolf....a sole director. The sign of the times for me is collaboration and interaction. I am looking at building an educational programme for people to enjoy their movement and to bring disabled facilitators more to the front line.'

'We are already working on creative collaborations together, teaching and choreographing, its been a great experience and a continued working relationship has come out of it, we just don't have this framework or the finances to facilitate it now. I am making a DVD promotion of my work and developing a proposal to the Arts Council. We are collaborating on a choreographic exploration titled 'Move It' – Exploring

new ways of mobility'. 'I find Marc's ability to dance whether in or out of a wheelchair truly riveting to watch and I think that we both feel that there is mileage in exploring these ideas further...'

'It has encouraged my curiosity to continue my studies and exploration into dance technique.'

'It's a great exchange. The next time I teach in London I will invite my co-mentor along.'

'I want to develop as an artist, I want to do more ballet with Ann, and more work on the Humphrey Technique so I can run my own classes and I want to do more choreography. I plan to develop a proposal to the Arts Council for a personal development programme, and Ann and I are talking about setting up an integrated ballet class.'

'I always thought disabled people were separate, had different needs, but now I am looking forward to the opportunity to attend a professional class with mixed abilities.'

'We've got grand ideas, this is the seed of an on going project which will involve more people learning ballet. We've got to go through the whole vocabulary of ballet and we're both keen to do it – it feels like pioneering work, and if you have the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to pursue what they choose to in life then this is the start of it. It will be pure learning to lose the traditional class structures... in this kind of work you respond to the moment...'

Photo credit: Nick Gurney



## On reflection...I feel...

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'Proud of myself.'

'Positive about it now that I've seen my co-mentor. She seems full of life and much more confident.'

'Slightly unsatisfied. I had a feeling my co-mentor had a lot to teach me. That hasn't happened. Nonetheless it is an amazing opportunity and a unique experience. It's an attempt to fulfill a gaping need...'

'Good – we've made something out of it. We have been able to explore, challenge and broaden each other's perspective of dance and choreography.'

'Very satisfied, empowered, I know a lot more now than I did before.'

'Quite bitter because of a personality clash issue. It's a really good model, and I would definitely do it again with someone else.'

'Quite proud of myself, with the publicity that's gone out people are recognising me, are aware of the co-mentoring project and have asked me questions, they have realised that we're useful, it's reversed roles...'

'I certainly feel that this time shared together has allowed us both to take a good look at ourselves and what we do. Over the length of this scheme, I have had the luxury of time shared with a fellow artist, dancer and friend.'



Photo credit: Andrea Testoni

## So what now?

We hope that now you have read about the experiences of the co-mentors you will be inspired to seek out or provide your own opportunities for co-mentoring.

We can provide additional information to help you with setting up your own scheme if you are an organisation, or your own co-mentoring arrangement if you are an individual. We have a suggested framework, a blank template for the co-mentoring agreement and information about budgets and expenses. These are all things that we would have found useful when we were embarking on this project.

**These documents are all available to download from our website [www.communitydance.org.uk](http://www.communitydance.org.uk) or can be emailed or posted to you if you contact our offices. All information is available in alternative formats.**

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## Some helpful suggestions

### Whatever you do...don't

- Be tempted to have unrealistic expectations
- Make assumptions about people's professional development needs
- Enter into this thinking 'this is not work'
- Pick someone who is just too busy
- Assume disabled dancers want 'just any experience'

### Whatever you do...do

- Research your co-mentor options
- Be clear about the time commitment involved
- Make time for your needs
- Be really clear about ground rules and stick to them
- Emphasise the need to respect and stay within agreed boundaries and respect personal boundaries at all times
- See it as a professional commitment and not a personal relationship
- Have a clear idea of what you have to offer, and what you need to know
- Have a third person present when drawing up a co-mentoring agreement
- Understand that making the agreement is very important and once agreed it should be taken seriously. If you don't you may jeopardise the experience for yourself and your partner
- Be very focused and put in time towards it
- Have very clear objectives but expect the unexpected, a lot can happen in six months
- Keep communicating with your co-mentor
- Leave your ego at home

### Organisations should consider...

- Having check points set before the project starts to ensure everyone's on the move with it
- Providing a framework to ensure that co-mentors are confident and clear about what they have to offer in the partnership
- Not being afraid to challenge the co-mentors
- Providing the space for a discussion around contemporary dance and community dance, and also about disability issues within these as part of the induction day
- Building in time to the evaluation day for co-mentors to talk about what they've done. Don't just focus on the experience of co-mentoring as people may want to talk about their artistic findings too.

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## **Sarah Scott**

Sarah has worked in the arts for twenty-five years mainly in the field of deaf and disability arts in theatre and on television. After Elmhurst Ballet School and Guildford School of Acting she studied Deaf Theatre and Sign Song in the USA and initiated and led the creative development of Sign Song in the UK. Since then her experience spans from performer and producer – Basic Theatre Company; board member and performer – Graeae Theatre Company; Deaf Development Officer – Unicorn Theatre for Children; Director – London Disability Arts Forum; Chair – Ch4 Disability Advisory Committee; Combined Arts Officer and then Disability Arts Policy Officer at the Arts Council of England (ACE). She assisted Jo Verrent at ADA inc in the DADA (Dance and Drama Awards) research carried out for DfES. She has been the Disability Arts Advisor for ACE New Audiences Programme, Advisor for Heart 'n' Soul Theatre Company, and has been and is mentor for several disability arts managers.

## **Sue Williams**

Sue has worked in the arts and disability field for sixteen years with a particular interest in training, education and development. Sue currently wears many hats working for Arts Council England as Disability Officer at the London Office and also developing the



Photo credit: Sue Akroyd

emergent National Disability Strategy at National Office. Previously she was the CreativePeople (the professional development network for the arts) Disability Co-ordinator based at Arts Council England – and still works closely with CreativePeople on a number of projects.

The Foundation for Community Dance is the UK development agency for community dance. It works for the development of community dance, and for greater access to high quality community dance for all.

Potential is a strategic programme of the Foundation for Community Dance which focuses on dance and disabled people. The main aim of Potential is to improve the access to and quality of opportunity for disabled people who wish to engage with dance either as a recreational activity or as a professional opportunity.

We produce monthly Potential Email Updates to keep you up to date and connected with news, events and opportunities relating to dance and disabled people. **To subscribe to this free, international service send an email to [potential@communitydance.org.uk](mailto:potential@communitydance.org.uk) with subscribe in the subject heading.**



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**Potential**  
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