

28 Dance and disabled people



Attik 360: A panoramic view

Clair Beckett, Community Dance Specialist, at Attik Dance, describes the development of Attik 360, an integrated group for adults with physical and learning disabilities based in South West England

In 2007 Attik 360 started its life as a single weekly dance class for adults with learning and physical disabilities. This class began with a dedicated group of dancers that met once weekly, and has now transformed into a whole programme of exciting opportunities, with new members joining every week. Attik 360 is inspired by the dancers themselves, their passion, creativity, and ideas that have shaped the work we do today.

The name Attik 360 describes the project and people perfectly, the 360 degree notion representing a diverse range of movers and creative ideas, the practitioners, dancers, carers, family, friends, all a part of the bigger picture. Attik 360 has the ability to naturally turn in new directions, influenced by the most individual and inspiring people we work with, merging our ideas and theirs into an ever changing and developing cycle of work for adults with or without disabilities.

I started my journey with Attik Dance in 2008. I was excited to see how we could develop this work, it was very popular, and I felt inspired by the wonderful people who attended. Every week was an experiment, we played, danced routines, used props and used so many different types of imagery, it must have been quite a confusing time for the dancers whilst I was still finding my way creatively. I then began to see crossovers in other Attik projects and how creative ideas and exercises did not need to be different, always trying to find my universal and inclusive way of teaching. What I learnt to do over time was to relax, and enjoy the people around me, and develop alongside their ideas and energies. Plans can go right out of the window, but that's ok.



Clair Beckett. Photo: Stacey Hindom

It is very important for us to get to know the dancers, the dancers being whoever comes through the door.

Originally the first Attik 360 class was a part of a programme for older dancers called 'Time to Dance', funded by the Primary Care Trust. We wanted to separate Attik 360 from the 'Time to Dance' programme and see how it developed itself, with a clear emphasis on the creative nature of the class and not presenting it as therapy or an exercise session. We wanted to provide weekly classes for adults with disabilities who felt uncomfortable in mainstream classes, and wanted to discover new ways of moving their bodies, to build their confidence and help them to engage in activities outside of Attik 360 as well. Through dance, creative movement, and their own choreography, Attik 360 aims to encourage individuality and independence, as well as providing the natural health benefits we all gain from dance.

I learnt from the first year of my experience with Attik that the environment is very significant in my work. You can disable people by not providing the right creative space. We moved from space to space and had problems with parking, access, carpeted flooring and carers not being supportive; we are always in constant >

Marcus Dill, Stop.Continue, Attik Dance Community Platform. Photo: Stacey Hindom

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Attik 360
Improvers
class.
Photo:
Emma Hoare

assessment and we never settle for less. Nothing is ever perfect, but it has to feel right for the group you are working with. If you avoid having conversations, and fail to get feedback from your group, you will never know whether what you're doing is accessible, progressive or meaningful. We want the environment to be comfortable and to be spacious so that everyone can dash about and have freedom and to express themselves in whatever way that might be. We create an atmosphere where people talk and feel comfortable and support staff can feel relaxed enough to join in if they wish to. We assess the work on a regular basis, we go with the flow, and aren't afraid to make changes and take risks. People come and go, and therefore we change all the time and so does Attik 360.

Communication throughout the sessions has become essential. We encourage the dancers to come together during the sessions to share their thoughts and feelings. This allows us to find our way and discover what we like, dislike, and what direction Attik 360 is going in as a group. Before

and after class is also a time to get to know the dancers and allows us to evaluate the sessions. We try to discover new ways that everyone can be involved and have their say. We then know their ideas and aspirations. We invite the dancers to join our board of trustees, be on interview panels, and attend conferences, and in this way we are all part of the whole journey.

In June 2010, Attik 360 was invited to make a dance film for the Innovation for the Creative and Cultural Industries (ICCI) 360 film festival, which was to be shown on a 360 degree screen in the city centre. It sounded like a perfect project, how could we refuse? After noticing one of the participants' fascinations with cameras, and all things technological along with another dancer's dedication and progression in the class, we decided that a film would be a great way to celebrate their skills. It's important to notice these details, keep an eye out for those moments when you spot development or an interest that could influence a creative project, this way you can help nurture the individual.

In collaboration with a University student filmmaker, 'Stretched' was entirely inspired by the dancers. The film was about the trust and confidence that they had developed. We looked at communication, restriction and extremes to develop the choreography. This was a massive eye-opener for all of us, it was intimate and the dancers really came out of themselves, moving like I had never seen before. It was a relaxed environment and we had a longer period of time to work. The regular class is extremely busy ranging from 6-25 participants weekly, only meeting an hour a week. The film experience was a huge turning point for Attik 360, and we began to see there was so much more we could do and offer to the group.

After talking with the dancers and staff, we decided from then on we needed to create more opportunities like this, and that a second class would be a great benefit to the already experienced group. Members could filter through the open class into an improver's class when they felt ready to try something a little more

challenging. We received funding for the second year running from the Claire Milne Trust to carry on the open class and this year we secured funding with the Big Lottery Fund to run a second class, 'Attik 360 Improvers' and develop this programme of work. This funding also allows us to run performance projects, workshops, professional development training for staff and to employ three more dance leaders to work on the Attik 360 project.

The open session has developed greatly since the film experience and the Improvers class has been a great progression route. It has been wonderful to see the dancers create and take ownership of the work, and has changed the way we teach in the regular sessions, we give the dancers the ingredients to move and then they make it themselves. Support staff have commented on how much the

dancers' confidence has grown since we have changed our delivery style and concentrated more on improvisation and creative tasks. We use follow-my-leader type exercises to get them thinking about how they can move and for them to see how it looks on others. It has been amazing to see them flourish and come out of their comfort zones.

Attik 360 will continue to expand, the number of participants has tripled in the last few years and we hope to provide as many opportunities as we can for the high demand. Next year Attik 360 will be making another dance film and performing again in local platforms. We will be starting seasonal workshops for disabled and non-disabled dancers to develop their skills in dance, choreography and other artforms. We are currently in the process of looking for funding to start weekly inclusive open evening classes

for creative dancers who are bored of traditional techniques and want to dance inclusively.

Attik's aim is to create a link throughout our whole community dance programme. We want to join people together to work more inclusively and creatively, finding ways for our different projects to merge. Whether this is through our inclusive teaching approaches, or by bringing the dancers together to integrate and move. This will happen through our community dance platforms, our open level classes, and projects. We hope for Attik 360 to never stop growing, allow the people to grow and let ourselves grow. We hope to get 360 out and about in the community to inspire others to dance inclusively and to inspire everyone around them.

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Marcus Dill,
Sarah Chalmers,
Attik 360
Improvers
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