

several supportive and knowledgeable individuals. Each person advised me to contact the manager and explain what had happened. With regret I didn't follow through on this advice. Was it because I didn't have the courage to do so? Was I:

- afraid of the implications of my concerns?
- afraid that the reporting of the incident may damage my reputation?
- letting the participants of my sessions down by shedding a light on this unpredictable behaviour?
- afraid I had somehow brought the incident upon myself?

The incident could so easily have gotten out of hand; one of us could have been hurt. How can we better equip ourselves in preparation for this kind of situation? Are we talking enough about the more 'dangerous' parts of our job?

The setting has a general duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act to "ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare at work of all [their] employees," which includes visitors to the setting. Could I have protected myself by ensuring I had a neutral, supervised space to wait? Could I now have had a frank conversation with the manager about the implications of the staff not being properly prepared for my visit?

I regret the incident and feel in sharing my story I might be doing a disservice to the people I love working with. However, community dance is not all about smiles on faces; it is also about having uncomfortable conversations that provide increased learning. With that in mind, I hope that sharing my story might spark others who have had similar experiences into beginning these difficult, but important, conversations.

This article has been published anonymously to respect the privacy of the author. If you would like to contact the author, please do so through People Dancing.

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# Bringing people together

**Siân James**, Communications Officer, Arts Council of Wales, discusses the positive repercussions of investing in new artistic opportunities for communities and dance practitioners in Wales

**Arts Council of Wales (ACW) were delighted to see last autumn's People Dancing conference – the first international event from People Dancing dedicated to participatory and community dance, and socially engaged arts practice – come to Wales.** Acknowledging our support for the event, we were pleased to be able to contribute to the 'Welsh' elements of the programme via our logistical support and funding for the Wales Commissions. We were very pleased that this prestigious community dance event took place in Wales, giving a boost to the nation's dance community and bringing new audiences to venues in Cardiff.

Wherever and however you work with people in dance, the People Dancing event provided an opportunity to share your practice and approaches to engagement across different international, social, economic and political contexts. It gave an opportunity to meet other artists, teachers and leaders, and to watch and talk about their work alongside inspiring and provocative keynote presentations from world-class figures.

ACW's funding allowed People Dancing to commission Wales-based community dance organisations to curate and present four new, high quality creative experiences and community dance performances. Each

of these was led by a Welsh dance artist working with an international dance artist, created with and performed by community groups from across Wales.

Wales has a long tradition of innovative community dance practice, which is widely recognised for its pioneering work. The commissioning of high quality international artists to work with Wales-based artists and groups challenged and inspired this practice. The attention given to researching and developing the creative process throughout the project is already having an impact on the development of community dance practice, increasing the quality of regular activity delivered. There is a real appetite for the development and sharing of opportunities within the dance sector in Wales, and being a part of this initiative was the perfect opportunity to whet that appetite.

Celebrating and reflecting the unique history of community dance in Wales, the four commissions that showcased at People Dancing were:

- Cai Tomos, who worked with international artist Anna Halprin, USA on a film documentary showing a new creative process. He shared his learning and spoke about his broad experience of working with older people
- Joanna Young, who, in partnership with international artists, Felipe

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Sousa, Portugal and Simon Clode, UK, presented stories reflected through an installation with film, sound and live performance with Powys Dance, a community dance company

- TAN Dance, who saw three of its artists, Carol Brown, Cathy Coombs and Leila Bebb, work with Onil Vizcaino, Spain to present a performance by people with learning disabilities
- Lisa Spaul, who created a piece with children and their parents based on sealife creatures in collaboration with international artist, Bronja Novak Lindblad, Sweden.

By working creatively with a dedicated international artist, Wales's artists were supported to create new dance performance work with people in community settings. The alchemy in this project was bringing together the best of Wales's contemporary community dance practice with international practitioners, ensuring that our home-grown talent would be taken in new creative directions by the relationships that came about. What we wanted was to bring about an injection of something new and fresh into our practitioners' work. From young practitioners in the early stages of their choreographic careers, to long-established and respected companies, we were looking for people to be taken on a new creative journey, one that would have a lasting and beneficial impact upon their practice.

Cai Tomos, who works through the medium of Welsh in North Wales, said:

"The greatest gift that any artist can be given is the opportunity, resources and space to keep asking those unanswerable questions that rise from the depth of their being. The commission has been a turning point, and will send ripples of change through my practice as I keep developing. Some of these changes are manifesting in a clearer sense of my own values and principles related to what I do. It's been a gift to have the time to truly be with those questions, to speak them to others, to ponder them, but most importantly to dance them."

For TAN Dance, a company with its base in one of the former heavily industrial areas of South Wales, the People Dancing commission was, according to Artistic Director, Carol Brown:

"A revelation! I wanted to work with Onil because I had seen and admired his diverse capacity company, Asi Somos. The quality and ambition of the work made it obvious that he could achieve wondrous art and also empower his dancers. Asi Somos do class; contemporary class. They learn at their own pace but Onil's expectations of what they can achieve takes them beyond what one might expect. I wanted myself and my team to learn how to offer our learning-disabled dancers that journey. It was more than I could have hoped for. His depth of knowledge of physical and cognitive challenges for learning-disabled people and his dance skills and experience were truly impressive. One thing I learned early on in the process was that to achieve what I wish will take time but he has given us a springboard from which my team and my dancers can leap."

Taking part in the arts brings people together. Taking part in artistic activity can be a powerful means of self-expression. It's a chance to assert your right as a creative individual to use your own imagination, your own voice in ways that are unique and special to you. Such things are important. And that's what we're all about.

A generous, tolerant and dynamic society values and respects the creativity of all its citizens. It's a society that embraces equality and celebrates difference and diversity, wherever it's found in race, gender, sexuality, age or disability. There's so much that can enrich and expand our culture.

This is why we want as many people as possible to experience and enjoy the arts; to be inspired by imagination and creativity, excited by ambition and spectacle, fascinated by the new and unfamiliar. It's what makes Wales an enjoyable and exciting place to live, work and play.

As Director of Engagement and Participation, Diane Hebb, says: "Our investment in People Dancing not only gave a platform for some of Wales's dance talent to be showcased, but also gave us the opportunity to support artists' development. It offered a learning and research process underpinned by individual artistic vision and ideas that, in turn, will aid individual artistic development and feed into the wider development of dance in Wales. And, of course, it gave us the opportunity to welcome the dance community to our fantastic Wales Millennium Centre."

The quality and range of dance activity continues to grow and develop here in Wales, and we've made a 'once in a generation' step change in our funding for dance by significantly investing in creating more opportunities for community and performing dance artists to develop their work – People Dancing being a prime example of this.

Audiences in Wales are increasingly expecting – and getting – the very best. What this specific initiative and the many other exciting projects made in Wales share is a sense of vision and reinvention – a determination to reach out and touch us in ways that entertain, inspire and affect us. Because at their best, this is what the arts do: they reveal new insights and understanding, and guide us towards new dimensions of experience. And if we feel better in ourselves for those moments of joy and fulfilment that the arts can provide, then so much the better. When so many aspects of everyday life can feel hollow and superficial, it doesn't hurt to be reminded that the authentic expression of ideas and emotions has a value and meaning that matters.

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