



Moving for the mind

Head of Dance Development and Learning at Déda **Clare Limb** talks about the partnership between Déda, Manchester-based Company Chameleon and the Radbourne Unit, an NHS hospital in Derby, that led to a morning of movement and reflection for people living with acute mental health conditions

In May 2017, staff and patients at specialist mental health care unit the Radbourne Unit in Derby welcomed Company Chameleon, Manchester-based dance theatre company, who delivered a dance and movement workshop. Offered in partnership with Déda, the workshop coincided with Company Chameleon's production of *Witness*, which was performed at Déda, the East Midlands' creative centre for dance, contemporary circus and outdoor arts, the evening before.

Witness, which explores mental health issues, draws from the personal experience of choreographer and co-founder of Company Chameleon, Kevin Edward Turner. Kevin took part in a post-show panel discussion alongside Déda's Creative Producer Phil Hargreaves, the Radbourne Unit's Richard Morrow, award-winning illustrator, designer and mental health

advocate Kate Smith and Head of Dance Development and Learning at Déda, Clare Limb. The discussion was an important platform for both audience and company members to share their thoughts on the piece and talk about the need for support for those experiencing mental health issues. Richard Morrow, head of nursing for Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, agrees that, "At a time when being able to talk about Mental Health without fear or stigma is high on the public agenda, this production and the workshop have helped those who attended access another avenue to understand and explore this complex aspect of humanity."

A number of workshop participants had attended the performance. Participant M shared: "I found the piece very emotional; I lost my husband

several years ago, and the grief was hard to take. So I could understand the message that was coming across in the performance."

Kevin, who has Bipolar Disorder, experienced his own mental health crisis in 2013 when he was sectioned under the Mental Health Act and went on to receive treatment in a specialist mental health unit. Kevin was keen to draw on personal experience to connect with the patients at the hospital, in order to support them to feel the full benefits of taking part in the workshop. He hoped to create a space where the people felt comfortable enough to express and share some of their own experiences. This didn't have to be through words, it could be through the dance or movement that they created. Kevin explains, "Movement changes the way you feel, it feels good to concentrate >>

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on your body and to feel the blood pumping around as you move. Also, sharing how you feel is a positive thing as it helps you better understand what you're going through."

Dance is a tried and tested method to support an individual's physical and mental health and wellbeing as it can help you express and manage feelings that might otherwise be overwhelming. This is one of the reasons that mental health is a theme in Déda's latest artistic programme. Déda recognises that the arts are a powerful aid to improving the health and wellbeing of adults, older adults, children and young people, and families. Our Dance Development and Learning Team have been developing work in a number of areas over the past few years including dance with people living with dementia; dance and creative movement as a means to improving postural stability in the over 65s; and improving people's mental health and wellbeing through a number of workshops and consultation events.

The first step into a partnership between Déda and the Radbourne Unit in Derby, which provides care to people with acute mental health conditions, was when staff at Derbyshire Healthcare – the NHS Trust that runs the unit – approached Déda to explore the possibility of doing some dance workshops as part of an enrichment programme for patients. This project was ideal in that it enabled us to find an appropriate starting point for that work and to support Company Chameleon to bring their work right into the heart of the Radbourne Unit for a morning of movement, reflection and participation.

Kevin and Theo Fapohunda, a dancer from Company Chameleon, were supported by Isobel Davis and Rachel Austin from Déda's Dance Development and Learning Team, with a view to the work being developed in the future as a regular arts experience for the patients on the ward.

When looking back at his own time in hospital, Kevin says that the more positive experiences were when people came in to lead activities with the patients. He adds: "I found them therapeutic as they gave me something to focus on other than the fact I was unwell in hospital. On a personal level, it feels like



Photo: Richard Richards Photography

my own journey is coming full circle, and it feels good to be able to offer a positive experience to people who are suffering, perhaps in a similar way to how I was."

Andrew Hurst, Chair of Company Chameleon and Chief Executive of One Dance UK recognises that with new initiatives launching, such as the ArtsMinds website for performing arts professionals, there's currently a real drive to break down the stigma of mental illness. He says that, "It's inspiring to see Company Chameleon tell a story that can make a positive difference by shaping perceptions around a real issue," and "fantastic to see dance being part of this movement for change".

Richard Morrow reflects on the experience: "The workshop gave those who attended an opportunity to experience movement and dance and its relationship to our emotional and psychological state. The way that Kevin and Theo approached the session was lovely, a fine balance between encouragement and respect for those in the room.

The transformation in two short hours was remarkable. People danced and shared their experience through movement and mutual respect, trust and being in close proximity to someone was established without awkwardness and anxiety. Kevin and Theo were able to establish contact with people in a couple of hours in a way that can often take a couple of weeks. We welcome the opportunity of partnership in the future to work

alongside groups such as Déda and Company Chameleon."

Over the next few months, Déda will be developing this work in a number of other health, education and community settings, including participatory work with people accessing Dementia Support Services as well as with older people in a variety of care and community settings in Derby. We are also at the start of a journey with partners Artcore and Derby City Council on a three-year project, Celebrating Age, working with older people to develop their creativity, whilst providing an opportunity for them to socialise. We will be capturing feedback from healthcare professionals and participants throughout the process in order to evidence the impact of the arts on health and wellbeing – and, moving forward, hope to forge new partnerships regionally and nationally.

Based on observations from conversations about the performance of Witness and during the workshop, we feel this work could have a real impact on the lives of individuals, particularly those whose lives have been affected by significant health conditions. We have been directly inspired by Kevin's work and the work of Company Chameleon, and the project has supported our ambition to further develop this important aspect of our programme.

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