

DANCING OUR WAY HOME

Photo: Aisha Golding.



Performer, practitioner, researcher and writer **Sandra Golding** shares her practice and perspectives on African Holistic Dance, highlighting its deep roots in wellbeing and community. In these spaces, dance becomes a language of healing, a celebration of survival, and a pathway to liberation.

Introduction

In many African and diasporic cultures, dance is not merely an art form; it is a way of being, a language of the spirit, and a vital tool for healing, storytelling, and community cohesion. African Holistic Dance, an evolving practice rooted in African and Caribbean movement traditions, positions the body as a vessel of wisdom, resistance, and restoration. It is not only a performance, but a spiritual and somatic journey, a process that links the individual to the collective, and the present to ancestral memory.

This article explores the role of African Holistic Dance within community settings, and the ways in which this embodied practice supports wellbeing, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and socially.

What is African Holistic Dance?

African Holistic Dance is an integrative approach to movement that blends African and Caribbean dance traditions with somatic awareness, energy work, and community-based healing. Unlike traditional dance forms taught in institutional spaces, African Holistic Dance often emerges from lived experience, oral traditions, and ancestral wisdom.

Drawing on rhythmic patterns, drumming, call-and-response, storytelling, breathwork, and elemental

>>

Earl Grey & Fifty Shakes Event. Photo: Idriss Assoumanou.



“African Holistic Dance is not a trend. It is a return – a re-rooting in ancient practices that honour the full spectrum of human experience.”

connection (Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether), the practice honours the cyclical rhythms of nature and life. Each session becomes a ritual, reconnecting participants with their body, land, lineage, and collective purpose.

Central to this approach is the understanding that healing and wellness are communal acts; individual transformation is inseparable from the wellbeing of the group. Dance, then, becomes a medicine – a way to return home to oneself while being held by the wider community.

Community as the dance floor of healing

In community spaces across the African Diaspora, African Holistic Dance is being used to reconnect people to themselves and to each other. Community centres, churches, allotments, schools, women’s shelters, care homes, and cultural festivals have all become stages for this kind of dance work. Here, movement is not judged by aesthetic standards but celebrated for its authenticity and capacity to express truth.

Workshops often begin in circle, symbolizing equality, unity, and the ancestral realm. When drums are sounded and music played it’s not just for rhythm, but to awaken memory, release tension, and guide the group’s emotional terrain.

In this setting, laughter, tears, stillness, and exuberant expression all have space.

The practice intentionally includes people across generations and abilities – elders, mothers, youth, those with mental health challenges, a range of physicalities – inviting each to find their rhythm and pace. Whether seated or standing, grounded or flowing, participants co-create a container for embodied truth and communal restoration.

Dance and wellbeing: A holistic perspective

Through a Western biomedical lens, dance is increasingly recognised as a form of physical activity that improves cardiovascular health, coordination, and fitness.

African Holistic Dance moves beyond the physical and addresses wellbeing across four interconnected domains:

1. Emotional and mental wellbeing

Through expressive movement and improvisation, participants can safely process trauma, grief, anxiety, and emotional blockages. Dance becomes a language when words fail. The repetition of rhythmic movement stimulates endorphin release, reduces cortisol levels,



Crossing Borders Respectfully. Photo: Idriss Assoumanou.

and promotes mental clarity. As participants move with breath and beat, they begin to unlock stored tension, allowing for release and emotional regulation.

2. Spiritual connection

African Holistic Dance sees the body not just as matter, but as energy. The practice often includes meditative sequences and chakra work (or energy centre alignment), particularly through the Moving A-N-K-H meditation, which integrates breath, movement, and ancestral invocation. Participants report feelings of grounding, expanded awareness, and connection to something greater than themselves – be it spirit, ancestors, or the Earth.

3. Social belonging and cultural identity

Many in the African diaspora experience cultural dislocation, marginalisation, and historical trauma. African Holistic Dance acts as a vehicle to reclaim identity, honour cultural roots, and strengthen social bonds. It is a space of joy, remembrance, and



resistance. In collective movement, the “I” becomes “we,” nurturing a deep sense of belonging.

4. Somatic awareness and body autonomy

Participants are encouraged to listen to the body’s internal signals and to move from felt sensation rather than imposed choreography. This somatic approach helps to build body trust and attunement, especially for those who have experienced dissociation or bodily alienation due to trauma, oppression, or health challenges.

Case studies and community impact

Across the UK and in diasporic communities globally, African Holistic Dance has been introduced in innovative ways:

Elder Dance Circles: In Birmingham, groups of African Caribbean elders gather weekly to participate in dance sessions that merge movement with storytelling, reminiscence, and collective care. Many have reported increased mobility, mood improvement, reduced

feelings of isolation, connection with others and community.

Mother and Baby Rhythms: In community halls, mothers come together with their infants for drumming, movement, and lullabies rooted in African traditions. These sessions enhance bonding, reduce postnatal anxiety, and create intergenerational memory.

Outdoor Allotment Movement: Some projects bring dance into green spaces, where participants engage with the elements – earth underfoot, sun on skin, air in breath – reaffirming their connection to the land and nature’s healing rhythms.

Healing Circles for Survivors: Women recovering from domestic violence or displacement have used African Holistic Dance as a tool for rebuilding confidence, reclaiming bodily autonomy, and reconnecting with joy.

These community-based projects demonstrate that dance is not only a tool for physical health, but also a potent form of social intervention, cultural education, and mental wellbeing.

>>



A Time To Breathe. Photo: Hana Kovacs.

“Workshops often begin in circle, symbolising equality, unity, and the ancestral realm. When drums are sounded and music played it’s not just for rhythm, but to awaken memory, release tension, and guide the group’s emotional terrain.”

Decolonising dance and wellness spaces

African Holistic Dance also raises important questions about who leads wellness, how knowledge is valued, and whose bodies are centred. In many wellness and somatic spaces, practices from African and Indigenous cultures are appropriated without acknowledgment. African Holistic Dance challenges this by placing Black bodies, voices, and experiences at the centre.

It insists that healing is not a product to be bought, but a birthright to be reclaimed. The practice affirms that cultural specificity matters – that dance rooted in African cosmologies can serve as powerful medicine for people who have been historically erased, exploited, or silenced.

By decolonising the lens through which dance is seen and experienced, African Holistic Dance invites a more inclusive, ethical, and embodied understanding of wellbeing.

Looking forward: Dance as community infrastructure

As global crises intensify – climate change, racial injustice, mental health epidemics – the need for culturally grounded, community-centred healing practices grows more urgent. African Holistic Dance offers a model for how movement can serve as infrastructure: a tool for resilience, cultural education,

and collective care.

Policymakers, educators, and public health professionals would do well to recognise and support these grassroots initiatives. Funding for dance and wellbeing should not only go to institutions and mainstream models, but also to community practitioners, elders, and cultural custodians who hold deep, embodied knowledge.

Conclusion

African Holistic Dance is not a trend. It is a return – a re-rooting in ancient practices that honour the full spectrum of human experience. In community, dance becomes a language of healing, a celebration of survival, and a pathway toward liberation.

To dance holistically is to remember. To move in rhythm with others is to mend the frayed threads of community.

To feel joy in the body is to declare, even in the face of adversity:

I am here, I am whole, I belong.

In the words of an elder dancer,

“When we move together, we remember who we are.”

Info

www.movingtubalance.co.uk

info@movingtubalance.com

People Dancing Summer Intensive.
Photo: Andrew Moore.

