

# “ADVANCE” Dance Tour

Increasing dance participation across the Tees Valley and developing young dancers.



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## Introduction

ARC currently supports the Tees Valley Youth Dance Company; a group of young dancers aged 14 – 19 in the Tees Valley who work to develop their dance skills and performance work. We wanted to deliver a programme of work, the “Advance” Dance Tour, which would both impact on the TVYDC members and the wider community of young people in different ways as outlined below.

The “Advance” Dance Tour was designed to:

- Equip the Youth Dance Company with a broad skill base that included dance performance and teaching making them stronger candidates for dance study and dance careers.
- Develop the Youth Dance Company additional skills in leadership, communication and planning to better prepare them for their own personal futures in education, relationships and careers.

The “Advance” Dance Tour also aimed to:

- Advance participation in dance across the Tees Valley by instantly engaging 300+ young people in dance activity
- Improve young people’s awareness of dance, enabling them to participate and be excited by the sport.
- Open the door between community dance and schools making it easier for ARC to promote dance opportunities to them in the future.
- Contribute to an increasingly active, healthier and creative community of young people in the Tees Valley.

The project, funded by People’s Postcode Trust ran from April 2014 – July 2014 and involved the Youth Dance Company and over 500 other young people aged 6 – 16.

## What we did

Debbie Waistell, a highly experienced Dance in Education practitioner worked with the Tees Valley Youth Dance Company over 15 sessions to develop their dance choreography, performance skills and leadership skills. Throughout the sessions they worked as a group with Debbie to plan an exciting dance workshop for other young people.

During this training period the Company took opportunities to work with a younger group of dancers where they led warm ups, cool down’s and exercises in preparation for their tour of schools.

We identified a two week period in July where the group were either available or allowed out of their schools in order to deliver their “Advance” Dance Tour before contacting schools across the Tees Valley about their availability.

Many schools demonstrated an interest in having the Youth Dance Company visit their school; in total nine schools signed up for a performance and workshop package with some of these schools having more than one workshop. The full tour took place between 1 July and 12 July 2014.

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## The Tour



The "Advance" Dance Tour travelled to nine schools:

- St Patricks Catholic College, Thornaby, Year 7, 8 & 9
- The Kings Academy, Middlesbrough, Year 10
- Northshore Academy, Billingham, Year 7
- Links Primary, Eaglescliffe, Year 3
- Thornaby Academy, Thornaby, Year 10
- Pentland Primary School, Billingham, Year 3 & 4
- Abingdon Primary, Middlesbrough, Year 5 Students
- Redcar Academy, Redcar, Year 9 & 10
- Corpus Christie, Middlesbrough, Year 5 & 6

We were also asked to deliver workshops in Darlington but due to the time availability these schools were unable to access a workshop, however we were delighted that we had interest from this area of the Tees Valley.

The Youth Dance Company visited each of the above schools sharing 30 minutes of performance and delivering a one – two hour workshop depending on need. In some schools they delivered more than one workshop due to demand from different year groups.

In total the Youth Dance Company worked with 516 young people through performance and dance workshops.

During the workshops we worked with the Company members to weave in different evaluation questions at the start and end of each workshop to evidence the impact of dance on the young people taking part in the workshops. They asked questions such as how creative people thought they were, if they knew about dance opportunities and if they were excited by dance. Coupled with the feedback from the school tutors we were able to gather a rounded view on how the workshops had impacted on the school students.

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## Successes



The "Advance" Dance Tour had real impact on all those involved with the project and over reached on a number of the given targets we hoped to achieve.

We set out to achieve a variety of project aims considering both the difference we wanted this to make for the Youth Dance Company members, the wider community of young people and ARC as an organisation.

Each aim of the project was measured and analyzed as appropriate to what we originally set out to achieve. All aims, measurement tools and impact detailed below:

### **For the Youth Dance Company Members:**

- Equipped with dance teaching skills
- Improved career prospects
- Improved skills in leadership, communication and planning
- Stronger candidates for dance

We measured the impact of this project on the aims above through a variety of techniques including a recorded group interview to measure pre and post skill ability, observation reports on all members undertaken by the Dance Coach, record of attendance on all training sessions, reviewing personal CV's pre and post activity and a case study on one dancer to assess the impact achieved.

Overall the Youth Dance Company members acknowledged the following benefits:

### **Increased performance skills:**

The Youth Dance Company members acknowledged their performance skills increasing as a result of this project; on a scale of 1:10 participants averaged at an increase of 2 points development. Choreographically they noted their own skills improving throughout this project on an average of 1.5points on a scale of 1:10. On a scale of 1:10 the most notable improvement from the YDC members was that their dance teaching skills improved with an average of 4points increase.

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### **Improved career prospects and aspirations:**

***"Now I could go into teaching just from this experience, it has enhanced my CV and I can put that I worked in a school for 2 weeks and not many people can say that" - Alex***

***"The leadership skills will be useful in my chosen career" – Imogen***

Three of the Youth Dance Company members have noted that they will be adding this experience to their CV and although one member doesn't have a CV yet she spoke about wanting to let people know she has done this in the future.

### **Improvement in Planning and Communications:**

The Youth Dance Company members spoke about other skills that improved as a result of being part of the "Advance Dance Tour", namely their planning, communications and leaderships skills. They talked about how they had to plan different phrases of movement to teach to other people and spent time figuring out how best to communicate with people of different ages and needs. One of the members mentioned:

***"Planning – it wasn't just that skills improved but knowing how to work on the moment and planning to shift and change throughout"***

This prompted a discussion about how the project taught them to work on initiative and supported them to problem solve and work with their own thinking.

Other comments included noting that communication with participants got easier and they grew in confidence throughout the project and learnt how to adapt to different users.

Their Dance Coach outlines benefits specific to each individual member. In particular one member is referenced as having developed a sense of planning to people's needs and a confidence in implementing discipline, another member 'grasped the complexity of teaching and developing effective teaching plans', one other member enhanced their own technique and performance through regularly training and being in a position of role model and the youngest member of the company developed confidence in her abilities through working with older dancers and teaching to her peers.

Overall the Dance Coach states that:

***"The opportunity for these young people to feel like a real company and have a taste of working as professionals has been extremely beneficial and rewarding for them which would benefit any career. The amount of workshops booked has meant they have worked long hours, undergone physically challenging activity, giving them a feel for working life, having to plan, perform and deliver workshops, deal with various situations and communicate with teachers in schools on a professional basis. It has been apparent that there has been a massive difference in every member and they***



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***have really benefitted from having the chance to work in this way"***

To strengthen the grounds for the "Advance Dance Tour" we looked into other similar opportunities for young people in the Tees Valley and the North East of England and found that none existed, evidencing that this project has provided an opportunity that has made a real difference to those young people involved and to the wider community of dancers that was only made possible through the support from People's Postcode Trust.

Through the "Advance" Dance Tour we also aimed to support the wider community of young people in the following ways:

**For the Wider Community of young people:**

- Increase in dance participation
- Increased awareness of dance opportunities in the area
- Young people excited about and interested in dance
- Young people are engaged in active and creative activity

To ensure we were meeting our aims for the wider community of young people we adopted a variety of measurement tools so we could effectively gauge how this project has made a difference to all individuals involved. We used online surveys sent to teachers, in session practical question games for the participants – these were conducted by the YDC members and analyzed by ARC staff, we also incorporated sign-up sheets for more dance information to be completed by the participants

Through the in session question and response games we identified the following benefits:

- 167 participants stated they would like to participate in other dance sessions following their involvement with the Advance Dance Tour.
- 52 young people stated they knew about dance and the opportunities in their area, following their interaction with the Advance Dance Tour, 154 stated they now knew about dance and opportunities they could get involved with demonstrating a 196% increase in dance awareness that the project achieved.
- 70% excited by dance after taking part in the Advance Dance Tour; this was a 30% increase on the number of young people who were excited by dance before taking part in the Advance Dance Tour sessions
- 92% of participants stated their heart rate went up during the dance workshops with 89% stating they felt healthier for having participated in dance activity
- 53 participants stated before the sessions commenced that they felt happy being creative with 187 stating they were either not at all creative or only a little bit, after participating in the dance workshops 132 participants stated they felt more comfortable being creative.

Through our online questionnaire teachers from schools we know that students "were in awe" of the dancers and that "they thoroughly enjoyed it (the workshops) and requested to do more dance as a result". We also learnt that the style of dance was new to many of the workshop participants and this excited them and we also know that for some schools this was their only opportunity to experience dance with over 60% of the schools getting involved through sports development recommendations.

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We also hoped to see some impact on how our organization works with schools and young people in the area. We identified that a key factor would be how many new schools we made contact with and how many young people left their contact for ARC to reach them about further dance opportunities. In total 30 young people left their contact details for ARC and we worked with 5 schools we hadn't previously worked with.

## Challenges



There were different challenges faced by all the people involved in the project but key issues included:

### Time

In order to accommodate schools for this tour we had to work within the summer term (April – July) – the most flexible term for schools. However this does also come with challenges of working around young people's exam framework, curriculum time and general summer term commitments. Having received the funding in April it was a short timeframe to get the schools signed up and also to ensure the Youth Dance Company were trained and adequately prepared for the tour.

This meant that a lot more staff time went into the project to maximise our time frame, coordinate all the bookings and logistics and we also had to add in longer sessions with the Youth Dance Company to sufficiently prepare them for the programme.

In an ideal world we would have more time to contact schools however we were able to still over achieve on our target number of students and schools engaged in the project due to the staff support we had on the programme.

### Lots of voices, all important!

Within this project we had to listen to and manage the voices of many different groups from teachers, students, youth dance company members, parents and the sports coach. All individuals had a different need or expectation from the programme and we had to

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ensure we were meeting these needs as well as delivering high quality activity and meeting our aims.

This is obviously not an unusual challenge when managing projects but nonetheless it was a challenge that presented itself. We overcame it by ensuring we did listen and accommodate people's needs, we invested additional staff support in the co-ordination of the programme and in support at the tour. This meant we were able to suitably meet school's needs, parents needs and the dancers needs to a high standard as well as improving the overall experience for all students involved.

### **Managing expectations of the group and schools**

For the Youth Dance Company members there was initially a huge excitement about being involved in the "Advance" Dance Tour and acting as role models, learning about practice, teaching other young people and performing. However as time moved forwards it became clear we needed to manage their own expectations of themselves and that we were not expecting them to deliver as experienced practitioners or perform as professionals but instead learn from the experience. This also meant ensuring that the teachers and students knew about the Youth Dance Company before hand and that they too were not expecting a professional company rather a peer to peer session.

By ironing these issues out with both school and the company members we were able to settle nerves and ensure all parties were positive about the experience. As a result the Youth Dance Company members did deliver a highly skilled and professional workshop which only improved with each school they visited and the feedback from schools was incredibly positive.

### **Next Steps**

The Tees Valley Youth Dance Company has secured some part funding for 2014/2015 and will also be subsidised for the first year with participants paying for their involvement with the Youth Dance Company.

However we still need to secure further funding to keep the Company going and in particular we will need to find another way to subsidise the "Advance" Dance Tour be this through funding support or through charging schools and groups for the YDC visit. The tour has had a huge impact on how dance is perceived, how many young people want to take part in dance now and also how a group of young dancers have gained invaluable experience to progress in their chosen careers. It is absolutely a programme of work we want to deliver again – we just need to find the resource to be able to do this.

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