

Dance and People with Disabilities – DANZ statement of position

Dance belongs to and is an expression for *everybody*. It knows no boundaries.

A person dances in their mind, in their little finger, or in the whole of their body. They dance their joy, their frustration, their individual or social message. Dance is a universal movement form, across all cultures on this planet. Dance is ancient - humans began to dance before or at the same time as they began to speak. Dance is a powerful medium for expression.

But dance differs in how it manifests itself in each culture today. Unfortunately in modern western culture much recreation activity reflects the organisation of our society. It is fragmented and can be quite graded and hierarchical rather than holistic and inclusive. For example, we work in one place with one set of people and we spend our leisure or recreation time in other places with other groups of people. This pattern of life and recreation makes it difficult for those who are marginalised - access to transport, flexibility with time and basic self confidence are often needed to take part in recreation.

Despite these challenges, expression through dance is powerful and effective. It works at all levels - spiritual, physical, social, emotional, creative. Such is the capacity of the human being when dancing.

In New Zealand people have worked in dance and creative movement with disabled people for many years. Most of this work has been quiet and voluntary community work, which belies the challenge, skill and satisfaction of working in this sector of dance. However, such projects have had considerable developmental and liberating effects on the participants, such as building confidence, skill, strength and new ways of expression (individual or collective), particularly through creative dance.

The role of dance has specific and powerful relation to the everyday lives of people with disabilities. It works on many levels and provides creative expression, fun, motivation, learning, community, challenge, wellbeing, involvement, achievement, a sense of pride and beauty.

But there are challenges to meet before opportunities can develop.

Access for this sector is a complicated issue. It is not simply that classes need to be organised. Issues to explore are:

- Appropriate venues - size, surface, venue accessibility, music and other resources, location and availability
- That this choice of creative expression is recognised and supported by the varied bodies that support the disability sector
- Training and support for dance practitioners working in the field and the establishment of a network
- Recognised rates of pay for community dance facilitators
- A sustainable career in this sector of dance work
- Participant access to venue, transport, cost, choice, flexibility in support services - so they can attend and there is project sustainability.

As we look to future development we need to ensure that dance facilitators/tutors will be emerging from the disability sector as well as the able-bodied dance sector.

New Zealand dance companies and projects that currently work in this field of expression, such as Touch Compass and Jolt, are precious and need to be adequately supported as role models and repositories of skill and example. We need to see them perform and provide workshops across New Zealand. It will require quite complex partnership work and education to solve these problems.

DANZ welcomes initiatives and partnerships within dance and the wider community that support the development of physical and creative expression for disabled people.

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DANZ is the national organisation for dance www.danz.org.nz