**What is Community Dance?**

(Text summarized from the Foundation for Community Dance http://www.communitydance.org.uk/)

Community dance is about professional dance artists working with people. What makes it 'community dance' as distinct from other kinds of participatory dance activity is determined by:

- The contexts in which it takes place (where, with whom and why)
- Approaches to dance practice that are informed by a set of beliefs and philosophies
- The values that it embodies and promotes.

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**Community dance is for anyone and everyone**

Community dance creates opportunities for people to access quality experiences in dance irrespective of where they live, their age, gender, sexuality, race, disability, educational attainment or economic circumstance. Participants do not necessarily have aspirations to work professionally in dance, but is recognised to be a valuable and inclusive route to working in dance professionally.

**Community dance happens anywhere and everywhere**

Community dance takes place in a range of settings each with a specific set of conditions, with a range of employers, but usually happens outside of statutory education and training settings, or professional performance contexts. It is often self-financing, but often receives subsidy in the form of grants from funding organisations.

**Community dance includes many kinds of dance, dances and dancing**

Community dance is not confined to any specific type of dance and is concerned with engaging people creatively and safely in a dance style, or exploring dance ideas and forms of their own. It can involve creating dance for performance, and is centrally concerned with the experience of dancing and the process of making dance, and includes many ways of 'participating' - learning, making, performing, watching and talking about dance.

**Community dance is led by highly skilled, professional dance practitioners**

Some dance professionals who work in community dance choose to call themselves community dance artists or practitioners; others 'animateurs', dance leaders or simply dance artists, with no reference to the word 'community'. Some work fulltime in community settings; others combine their work in community dance with professional dance activities in other contexts such as dance lecturing, performing.)
Community dance can:

- Contribute to the development of dance as an art form, and support the artistic development of professional and non-professional dancers
- Impact positively on people's health and well-being, their personal motivation and their social relationships
- Provide people with an important focus for their lives, overcome barriers to participation and enhance peoples’ sense of community
- Offer people new ways of relating to other people, based on respect and valuing difference
- Enhance the quality of relationships between people, their communities, their dancing and their dances
- Make a positive contribution to wider social change, and artistic and learning agendas.

Community dance professionals believe that:

- All people have the right to have creative and expressive lives through the medium of dance: to choose dance and to choose why, how and with whom they dance
- Everybody has the capacity to dance, express themselves and make meaning through dance and that by engaging with it, every individual has a creative and powerful contribution to make to their communities in a safe, supportive environment
- To operate as artists do - with an artist's questions, perspectives, intuitions, feelings and responses; to make sense of and create meaning in the world - is of itself a positive, empowering and humanising activity for people to engage in
- Connecting people to dance experiences over which they have ownership, and through which achieve a sense of belonging, individual's lives and their experiences of being in a community can be changed for the better
- Dance can contribute to the personal and social development, and the health and well-being of individuals in society
- When it actively engages people as creative participants, dance can help build stronger communities and enhanced engagement with wider social agendas.

Values

Professionals leading, providing and supporting community dance share a set of values about people, society, art, creativity, learning and the world we live in. These values are central to their work, informing and guiding what they do, why they do it, and how they do it.

Community dance practice that embodies these values is about:

- People enjoying dancing, expressing themselves and their life experiences creatively, learning new things, and connecting to each other, their communities and cultures
- An equal concern for people and art: providing high quality dance experiences, and having a belief in participants that enables them to achieve high quality outcomes in which they can take pride and have a sense of achievement
- Challenging aesthetic norms and broadening perceptions of who can dance, what dance is, and what it might be
- Providing opportunities to explore the art of dance and to have critical engagement with their own dance and the dance of others: asking artistic questions, seeking solutions and reflecting on their dance experiences
- Offering opportunities to gain new skills and insights: learning about dance, in dance and through dance
- Placing people, their aspirations, rights and choices at its heart: recognizing the individuality of participants and working with them in ways that support them to find their own dance ‘voice’
- Creating a ‘safe’ space where individuals can fulfil their human and creative potential, where they feel positive about themselves and are respected and valued by others, enabling them to grow, develop, and build positive and active relationships within their wider communities.