

12th July 2011

Dear LUTSF Secretary,

RE Dance for Parkinson's Course, Mark Morris Dance Group, NYC

Dates: May 12th-18th 2011

Place: Brooklyn, New York City

Time scale: 3 days

Please find enclosed two copies of my report, a CD containing the report a copy of this covering letter and an attendance certificate.

The purpose of the trip was to:

- Refresh my practice and knowledge
- Learn more about the Dance for PD sessions, as taught by the Mark Morris Dance Group
- Share the challenges I face through delivering my sessions in the UK
- Meet international practitioners working in this area

All the above aims were met and surpassed during a well delivered and enjoyable course. There were numerous highlights and these include:

- Participating in a class with over 65 people including members of the Brooklyn Parkinson's Group and the course delegates
- Listening to the Brooklyn Parkinson's Group and how attending this class has literally changed their lives
- Break out sessions with experienced teachers from around the world
- Discussing the design of dance specific exercises to alleviate the symptoms of Parkinson's Disease

I am planning to make a presentation about my trip to the Parkinson's UK Croydon Branch and the UK Parkinson's and Dance Network. I will also share this report with Parkinson's UK and Croydon Council, who currently fund my Dance and Parkinson's group.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the trust for awarding my project with a travel bursary. This provided such a unique chance for me to study this area of my work in depth, on an international level.

Yours sincerely,

Gemma Coldicott

Dance for Parkinson's Disease:

Course for practitioners, Brooklyn, May 2011

Delivered by The Mark Morris Dance Group



Croydon Parkinson's Group Participant. Photo by Aimee Stevens

An evaluation report by Gemma Coldicott

Background to the project

I have been leading a weekly dance class for people with Parkinson's Disease (PD) in Croydon for over two years. The class starts with seated exercises and dance sequences such as port de bras, moving on to using the chair as a barre, then travelling sequences across the space ending in a circle for a breathing exercise to cool down.

As I work alone I sought out other Dance Practitioners working with similar groups, such as Daphne Cushnie. I contacted Daphne in January 2008 after seeing an article about her work in Animated. Daphne is a Neuro-Physiotherapist and a dance teacher. I also made contact with Maria Benini, Joanne Duff and Anna Gillespie who run classes in Kentish Town and Wimbledon.

Through these links I was invited to a training day at The Place in October 2009, ran by David Leventhal and John Heginbotham from the Mark Morris Dance Group (MMDG). This was repeated in April 2010 at Siobhan Davies Dance Company. This initial introduction to David and John gave me an insight into their work, they have lead a dance class for people with Parkinson's in Brooklyn for over nine years.



David Leventhal teaches a Dance for PD class for members of the Brooklyn Parkinson Group at the Mark Morris Dance Center. Photo by Rosalie O'Connor.



John Heginbotham leads a member of the Brooklyn Parkinson Group in classes at the Mark Morris Dance Center. Photo by Amber Star Merkens.

My classes are growing and now attract 16-20 elderly people each week, a combination of people with Parkinson's and their carers. As my work in the area is growing, and it is such a complex medical condition, I decided to attend the MMDG three day intensive to increase my knowledge and expertise in this area.

My aims in attending the MMDG course:

- To learn more about the MMDG approach to dance and PD and to assimilate it with my own practice, where appropriate.
- To meet more people working in this area. The backgrounds of the people on the course were vast such as Nurses for PD, Yoga Teachers, Physiotherapists and Dance Teachers.
- To learn more about the disease through listening to a Neurologist and speaking to other delegates.
- To share the challenges I face in leading and running the group with the other experienced teachers.
- To be inspired and rejuvenated in my dance practice with my Croydon group!

Workshop schedule



*Members of the BPG dancing at the MMDG.
Photo Katsuyoshi Tanaka*

Friday 13th May

- Introduction and schedule overview
- Dance for PD demo class with David
- Overview of PD by a Neurologist
- General dance and PD discussion with Ollie Westheimer, Executive Director Brooklyn Parkinson's Group (BPG) and David Leventhal

Saturday 14th May

- Dance warm up with David
- 'Why dance for PD' film screening
- Training module: Exercise Design
- Break out sessions with experienced teachers
- Plenary

Sunday 15th May

- Dance warm up with John
- How to start and maintain a class
- Sharing practice and ideas for exercises
- Dance for PD class with BPG and discussion with group members
- Final discussions and close



Members of BPG at the MMDG studios. Photo by Amber Star Merkens

Reflections from sessions

Dance, not exercise:

- During the course there was a lot of discussion around the benefits of dance for PD rather than exercise. As a dance practitioner working with a group who have a medical condition I often feel pressure to treat the condition of PD rather than run sessions for the individuals. Some of the participants of my class are also more interested in exercising than dancing and they do not always understand the benefits of dance. Some of the differences we discussed were imagery, dynamics, aesthetics, sequencing of movement, creativity, musicality and mind body connections. It was great to be reminded of these benefits rather than to over look them in preference of working on medical symptoms.

Fun and laughter:

- My sessions contain lots of fun and laughter but it was good to be reminded how important this is. David and John's sessions bring lots of laughs and many exercises contain fun/silly elements. For example, getting out of the chair is very difficult for many people with PD. David gave a great activity for getting out of the chair by asking them to imagine they are sitting at the Oscar ceremony and are nominated for best actor. Your name is called and you have to show your emotions on hearing your name and then stand to collect your award. This exercise not only gives a way of getting out of a chair and forgetting aches and pains but also works the facial muscles, which are often adversely

affected by PD medication. This was also such a great way to make everyone feel special which is another key objective in a session for people with PD.



*Participants of the Croydon PD Group sharing a joke.
Photo Aimee Stevens.*

Complexities of the disease:

- Although I have researched PD, through the internet and medical journals, hearing from a Neurologist gave me invaluable information about the disease. There are so many ways it affects people such as sleep disorders (a side effect of medication), anxiety and panic increases, blood pressure and cognitive problems. This is in addition to tremors and freezing which are the most common visual signs of PD.
- We also discussed how to sensitively talk to our groups about how PD affects their everyday lives. David gave the example of how buttons can be difficult and one of the delegates, with PD, told us that getting change out of your purse to buy things is very difficult. Therefore as leaders we need to design exercises to relieve these symptoms and to assist with everyday life.
- The Neurologist also discussed how everyone with PD has such a different experience and also goes through many good days and worse days. I have seen significant changes in members of my group from one week to the next, sometimes negative changes. When I have asked the person how they are feeling there has generally been an adjustment in their medication, which has brought on dyskinesia (involuntary movements). Therefore it is so important to have this information from the group.

Exercise design:

- Attending the course reminded me of the things I already know about dance and how I should bring the same approaches that I use in my contemporary and creative sessions to my PD dance sessions. For example, the importance of discussing alignment at the beginning to increase the length of the spine and neck and to bring awareness to the centre. The use of imagery is also vital, perhaps even more so than a standard technique

class, as we discussed visualisation as a tool for working with people with PD to alleviate freezing of muscles and limbs.

- The relationship between dance and music was discussed at length and the benefits for people with PD. This can also add to the fun of the session as demonstrated by John and David. One exercise with the BPG was based on games of cards and rolling dice at a Casino. The pianist played 'Luck be a lady tonight' bringing smiles to everyone's faces.
- At times in my sessions I decide to simplify exercises or not to push the group but having attended the course I can see now that this is not always the best thing to do. Some exercises, especially involving balance, should be approached with caution but from hearing accounts from the Brooklyn Parkinson's Group they definitely do not want the teachers to 'go easy on them' because they have PD. Problem solving is part of life, especially for people with PD, so difficult exercises encourage the group to problem solve to find their own level of response.



Country dancing with the Croydon PD Group. Photo Aimee Stevens.

Joint challenges and difficulties:

- It was very reassuring to meet other practitioners who face the same challenges as me, such as funding and sustainability of classes. Everyone agreed that there is a big demand for the sessions with a high number of people with the disease. Together with this there is little recognition for dance for PD from the medical world and many Parkinson's charities, whose main aim is to find a cure.
- Finding time to promote the classes and to raise the profile of the work was another common challenge to us all. Local media in Croydon seems to be more interested in reporting on problems the borough faces such as gang crime. However this is so important in regards to gaining more attendees and attracting future funders. Having watched the MMDG 'Why Dance for PD' film it inspired me to think about trying to make a similar short film with my Croydon group.
- At the moment my funding will last until the end of the year but I need to start working towards finding a further source of income and, preferably funding over a three-year period. The main cost of the classes is the transport to the sessions as many of the participants are quite frail and unable to use public transport.

Outcomes

- Attending the course was very reassuring as my approach is similar to that of David and John. For example a main focus of my sessions is coordination and balance, the same as the MMDG sessions. The course has given me confidence to build on this existing foundation and has rejuvenated my creativity and ideas.
- I have instigated a more open dialogue with my group at the beginning and end of every session to talk about the exercises more in-depth, such as which ones were most helpful and why. At the beginning of each session I go round to each person to check up on how his or her week has been and if there is anything I need to know.
- During the practical sessions on the course, a Pianist accompanied us. Since returning I have found my own pianist who plays for us each week. This has added a new dimension to the sessions and lifted it to a new level. Although we are still figuring out how to best work with each other there have already been moments when the group spontaneously applaud after an exercise. The sense of celebration and joy has been really inspiring.
- I am seeking more publication and I am looking into how to produce a short film about the group. Watching the 'Why Dance for PD' film gave me lots of inspiration about how to make a good documentary about the group. I am also hoping to develop a website in the next 12 months.
- I am seeking to develop a second group in the north of the borough to extend this provision for Croydon for 2012.



The Croydon PD Dance Group. Photo by Aimee Stevens.

Attending the MMDG Dance for PD Course enabled me to reflect on my practice and to consolidate and increase my knowledge in this area. I am very excited about the future for the group and have lots of plans to improve the sessions and to raise the profile of the group in the local community.