

Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Report 2017

Creating international collaborations and understanding of dancers' health

Travel dates: 3rd July – 14th July 2017

Location: New York City, NY and Kansas City, MI

Project overview

Having worked in dancers' health for a number of years in the UK, I strongly felt that the sharing of knowledge internationally was imperative to ensuring dancers could seek the best possible care wherever they are in the world and also to build peer to peer support in this area. I embarked on this visit in order to; meet experts working in dance medicine and science in New York and across the US; further my knowledge on the processes undertaken by dancers when injured in the US; discover how we can use technology to aid this process and to find future ways of building an international community. This was coupled with the recent development of the Performers' Health Hub mobile application to help connect dancers with specialist healthcare, and the need to further understand healthcare for dancers internationally and how to assist dancers through the use of this app.

I was overwhelmed by the number of people I was able to meet, the information shared, and possibilities for ongoing communication on my return to the UK, and am indebted to LUTSF, without whom this would not have been possible. This also allowed me to explore various perspectives on dancers' health, from meeting healthcare professionals to professional dancers and company managers. In order to make the most of my trip I planned my schedule meticulously to meet as many relevant people as possible.

The information I was able to take away from this visit has been invaluable and continues to progress past the end of my travels, which was one of the aims of the visit. This includes several blog posts, ongoing dialogue with those I met during the trip, and further expansion of the Performers' Health Hub app to help dancers in the US reach specialist healthcare and information easily.

Claire Farmer

Report

Every aspect of this journey was so inspiring and informative that it is difficult to distil everything I will take away from this trip into words, however I shall endeavour to do so.

Having studied and worked in the area of dance medicine and science for a number of years, I felt it imperative not only to my own personal development, but that of my work as director of Dance Longer Dance Stronger and Manager of National Institute of Dance Medicine and Science, to explore this field internationally and meet people working both within and without this field.

My trip was split into three distinct sections, commencing in New York City to visit a couple of dance companies and establish health connections for my return trip, followed by a visit to Kansas City to attend the Dance USA conference and returning to New York City to spend time with healthcare professionals at the Harkness Centre for Dance Injuries, Westside Dance Physical Therapy and the Samuel Friedman Health Centre for the Performing Arts.

There were several aims to my visit; firstly, to understand whose health services dancers currently use should they become injured, both in a professional company and as independent dancers, and how they fund this. Secondly, to meet with some of these health professionals and see first-hand the services they provide. Finally, I wanted to explore the use of technology, an area that I feel is currently underutilised in dance, how this might be used to connect dancers internationally and enable them to share the most current and reliable information on their health.

On arrival in New York City I visited Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and Graham 2 who were performing during my stay. Watching the physicality of their performances I was intrigued to find out where they sought their healthcare, and managed to speak to their company manager about the experts they visit in New York City when they are injured. I also visited, and took class at, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre and was fortunate enough to be able to meet Shaw Bronner, Director of Physical Therapy Services at Alvin Ailey and Director of Analysis of Dance and Movement (ADAM) Center during my visit.

It was wonderful to discover how dancers were currently coming into contact with specialist health services, whether they were provided in house such as at Alvin Ailey or directed to specialists working locally. However, I also wanted to connect with dancers who currently have no connection with the world of dance medicine and science, and find out about their experiences looking after their own health. This part of my trip took me to the Dance USA conference in Kansas City, MI. As the only international delegate (as far as I was aware), I was able to meet dancers and company directors from across the US and those outside of our network of dancers in the UK and also experience a different outlook on the dance industry. The conference also became a beneficial central meeting point for those with whom I had only previously conversed with via email, including Catherine Tully, owner and editor of 4dancers.org. Within the 4dancers website sits the Dance Wellness Panel, sharing short articles on dancer's health, many of which feature in the Performers' Health Hub app. It was therefore hugely beneficial to be able to meet face to face to discuss the

ways in which we can collaborate to ensure the current research reaches dancers in an easy to digest format.

My unique position as the only international delegate also allowed me to offer a different perspective on conversations during the conference such as the use of digital technology in dance. Whilst the conversation focused on the sharing of dance within the US, I was keen to point out its ability to connect dancers across the world, and share experiences and knowledge that we otherwise might miss out on. This ability to share differing experiences from other countries, as someone entering the Dance USA conference and experiencing the dance conversations therein, and also offering my experiences from the UK to the room, was invaluable. During my time here I was also able to take part in a “one minute with...” film for Dance USA which was shared on their YouTube channel.

Understanding the US health system was also an important factor in helping me to understand a dancers’ journey from an injury, through rehabilitation and back to performing. The wonderful thing about this trip is that I saw this journey from many different angles; from the dancer’s perspective, the company manager’s perspective, those in a position to treat the dancer such as physical therapists and surgeons, and those within support organisations such as the Actors Fund who help performers with issues such as organising their insurance. Even talking to my taxi driver on the way to Kansas City airport whose niece was a dancer and had experienced an injury, but didn’t know where to go for treatment and was subsequently misdiagnosed. This gave me even more drive to ensure that the relevant and expert information available really reaches those who need it. Meeting all of these people also gave me a greater appreciation for the healthcare we provide in the UK for our dancers. Although we would always prefer there to be more specialist services for dancers, the density of our support, particularly free services through the NIDMS NHS dance injury clinics, is far higher than in the states.

During the final day of the Dance USA conference I was able to attend the Dance USA Task force on dancers’ health meeting, led by Dr Nancy Kadel. The task force comprises of medical professionals who work directly with professional dancers, and also oversee the screening project for professional dancers. I was delighted to be able to attend and hear about the current screening and injury tracking work being carried out by the task force, and also to share similar information from the UK and highlight possible opportunities for collaboration and information sharing.

On my return to New York City I spent a full day shadowing the physical therapists and athletic trainers working at the Harkness Centre for Dance Injuries, as part of the Langone Medical Centre. Immediately upon entering the centre it was clear that this was designed specifically for dancers and I could understand how a dancer would feel reassured when entering for treatment. This reassurance was further instilled whilst observing one of the team of physical therapists. It was clear from her posture and the conversation with the client that she was previously a dancer, and discussions of the choreographic demand of their work immediately put the client at ease as they obviously felt understood and in safe hands.

I was also able to observe an Injury Prevention Assessment (IPA) with a young dancer who had recently begun pointe work. Although it might seem that trying to instil the importance of good nutrition, alignment and strength would be difficult in a young dancer, I was impressed how the athletic trainer empowered them to take away this knowledge and also to educate the parents on good, safe practice. I was delighted that during the day Dr Marijeane Liederbach took the time to meet with me to discuss her research and the International Performing Arts Injury Reporting System

(IPAIRS) and allowed me to visit the biomechanics laboratory a few blocks away. This gave me a rounded picture of the treatment but also the ongoing research that takes place at the centre.

I was able to further explore other healthcare options in New York City with a visit to Westside Dance Physical Therapy, founded and run by Marika Molnar. Again, I was extremely grateful that someone of Marika's standing found the time to show me around, take me through the equipment used at WDPT and also with the New York City Ballet, with whom Marika has worked since 1980.

The final stop on my visit was to the newly opened Samuel Friedman Health Centre for the Performing Arts in Times Square. Here I was able to meet two of the Mount Sinai doctors in charge of the services, and discuss what specialist healthcare they are able to offer to dancers. The health centre is funded through the Actors Fund who are based on the two floors directly below the health centre. Here I met members of the team working directly to support dancers through injury support groups and additional resources, and discuss ways in which to collaborate and share information internationally to support dancers further.

The resounding feeling I will take away from this trip was the enthusiasm and support for this area of work, in particular my aims to connect dancers internationally in our support of dancers' health, both from a service point of view, but also peer to peer.

During and since my return from the US I have published several short blogs about my experiences on my website www.dancelongerdancestronger.com and will also publish a short blog on the National Institute of Dance Medicine and Science website www.nidms.co.uk. The information gathered will also feature in the Performers' Health Hub app, as I expand the content to further bridge the gap between expert information and the dancers on the ground.

Dance USA video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZ5Co6_eGhA&index=13&list=PLrK8p3MmYWhPurGIAHCmQxA G4GFrXjR4h

Blog Posts

<https://www.dancelongerdancestronger.com/>

<https://www.nidms.co.uk/blog-1>

Places, people and organisations visited

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

Catherine Tulley – 4dancers.org

Charlotte Ballet

Contempo Physical Dance

Dance USA

Dance USA Task force on dancers health

Dancer Wellness Project

Dr Jason Kindt

Dr Marijeanne Liederbach

Dr Nancy Kadel

Harkness Centre for Dance Injuries

Houston Ballet

Joffrey Ballet

Kansas City Ballet

Kaufmann Centre for Performing Arts

Koresh Dance Company

Marika Molnar

Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance

Miami City Ballet

Peridance Centre

Samuel Friedman Health Centre for Performing Arts

Shaw Bronner

The Actors Fund

Westside Dance Physical Therapy