



Background

Together We Dance was developed to support parents and carers, particularly those caring for autistic children, who were experiencing social isolation and reduced opportunities for connection.

While services often focus on the needs of children or on formal support structures, this programme intentionally centred carers themselves, as individuals deserving of time, movement, joy and connection.

Together We Dance offered structured, welcoming social dance sessions designed to strengthen social health and improve mental wellbeing through shared experience.

The programme ran from September 2025 to February 2026.



Why Social Health Matters

Social health, our ability to feel connected, included and valued, underpins both mental and physical wellbeing.

For many carers, isolation can be intensified by demanding responsibilities, limited personal time, reduced access to inclusive social spaces, and social stigma or misunderstanding.

When connection reduces, stress increases. When belonging grows, resilience strengthens.

Together We Dance was built on the belief that social dance can act as preventative infrastructure, a space where connection happens naturally and wellbeing improves as a result.

Programme Delivery

Over six months:

- 60 one-hour sessions were delivered
- 27 parents and carers engaged in the programme
- Sessions ran in a consistent weekly format
- Participation remained flexible to accommodate caregiving realities

Attendance reflected real life. Some participants attended for a full ten-week block, while others joined more flexibly across the programme period. This pattern is typical within community-based provision for carers and reinforces the importance of low-barrier, welcoming design.

Participant Profile

GENDER

89%	11%
Female	Male

AGE RANGE

4%	11%
18–24	25–34
26%	19%
35–44	45–54
22%	19%
55–64	65+

AREA OF RESIDENCE

63%	15%
Belfast	Ards & North Down
11%	4%
Lisburn & Castlereagh	Antrim & Newtownabbey
4%	4%
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	Mid Ulster

CARING ROLE

56%	19%
Parent	Carer
15%	11%
Grandparent	Other

HOW PARTICIPANTS HEARD ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

52%	22%
Local community group	Social media
11%	7%
WhatsOnNI	Visit Belfast
4%	4%
Family or friend	Other

Wellbeing Impact

During the programme we utilised the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale which showed improved mental wellbeing for the majority of participants.

Participants reported reduced stress, improved mood, increased confidence, greater social comfort, and feeling lighter after sessions.

"I always come away feeling lighter."

"This is my time to switch off completely and be in the moment."

"I will miss Tuesday evenings, they have been so much fun."

"Thank you for everything, I've really enjoyed learning to dance."

The Social Impact

The most significant outcome was connection.

Participants described meeting others who understood their experience, feeling seen beyond their caregiving role, reclaiming joy and identity, and developing supportive peer relationships.

The programme naturally embodied the Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing: Connect. Be Active. Take Notice. Keep Learning. Give.

During delivery, Our Social Space became recognised as a Take 5 Champion organisation, further embedding wellbeing principles across our work.

Wider Impact and Sustainability

Together We Dance strengthened our capacity to deliver preventative, community-based wellbeing programmes.

The model has since been commissioned within a statutory context to support carers in a related initiative, demonstrating credibility, transferability and scalability.

The programme confirms that carers will engage when spaces are welcoming and flexible, and that social dance is a low-intensity, high-impact intervention supporting community wellbeing.

Conclusion

Together We Dance delivered 60 sessions and engaged 27 parents and carers across the wider Belfast region.

Beyond numbers, it created a consistent weekly space, a peer community, measurable improvements in wellbeing, increased confidence and connection, and moments of joy.

The programme demonstrates that social dance is not simply recreational activity, it is preventative social infrastructure.

Our Social Space remains committed to creating inclusive, arts-led programmes that strengthen social health and help people connect, move and belong.

Acknowledgement

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Public Health Agency, through the Clear Project, for supporting this pilot programme.

This investment enabled us to test, evaluate and refine a preventative, community-based approach to improving social and mental wellbeing among parents and carers.

The learning gathered through Together We Dance will directly inform future delivery. We will apply these insights as we continue to develop and strengthen the programme in the coming months, ensuring it remains responsive, accessible and impactful.

We are grateful for the opportunity to bring this vision to life and to demonstrate how connection, movement and shared joy can strengthen community wellbeing.



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OUR SOCIAL SPACE



CONTACT US

Dance Addiction Studios

1A Parkgate Avenue, Belfast, BT4 1JA

Email: info@oursocialspace.org.uk

Tel: 07428 453 334

Website: www.oursocialspace.org.uk

Facebook: [/SocialSpaceBelfast](https://www.facebook.com/SocialSpaceBelfast)

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