

prosper
out of the storm

A Report on:

**Moving Well:
A Prosper Adventure Project**

by

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November 2013

An overview of Moving Well

Introduction

This report gives an outline of the *Moving Well* Adventure, a multi-agency collaborative initiative funded by the Arts Council England through Canterbury Festival's *Prosper: Out of the Storm* initiative designed and produced by The Map Consortium and Workers of Art. The Adventure commenced in late April 2013 and culminated in a series of events which took place in October and November. Facilitated by additional funding these comprised a performance of *More Please* at the Gulbenkian Theatre Canterbury on the 28th October, a subsequent performance at the Theatre Royal Margate, 14th November, and an open community workshop in East Sussex.

The Adventure

The project in its entirety ran from April 2013 to January 2014 and aimed to produce a model of creative practice integrating dance and digital technology (DT) to affect 'transformation' and 'transportation' for participants and spectators through choreographed reflective and symbolic representations of real-life stories narrated by older people, some of whom have severe disabilities. In the first instance the project involved a group of females aged 50-82 for whom the outcome would be a public performance. Alongside the artistic directors' ambitions to develop a new performance aesthetic privileging the older female body was an attempt to explore and exploit the integration of digital technology in both the creative process and performance. It is worth noting that earlier experimental workshops had demonstrated a number of potential beneficial effects (physical) which had emerged in, and as a result of, participant engagement with digital projections. Key to the ongoing development of this latest performance was the development of new creative approaches working with digital artists, and an anticipated increase in creativity, as well as mobility, on the part of the participants.

The process at the core of the Adventure proposed a better understanding of the relationship between the dance/movement and digital technology, and the overlapping concepts of health and wellbeing as people age. There were further ambitions to assess the feasibility of transferring such initiatives from the open community to continuing-care residential environments for older people.

From the perspective of the digital artists, Butch Auntie, this was an opportunity to embark on an adventure beyond the conventional practice(s) hitherto associated with their work. The partnership offered Pete Wallace and his colleague John Worthington a unique opportunity to combine their specific practice and technical expertise with those of StevensonThompson. Not only were they involved in developing the creative approach to transforming the space, they participated in the live moment of the performance working with and responding directly to the movement of the performers. Below Pete Wallace describes his and John's creative input and overall experience of the Adventure.

The digital projection implemented by the AV company, Butch Auntie, was intended to allow a high level of interaction between the participants and the background on stage. Rather than using more traditional, highly choreographed changes which are pre-ordained, the visuals production and delivery specifically used hardware and software that gave an opportunity to experiment and 'play' with the light being shone onto the stage. Sensors that used 3D data were able to provide detailed silhouettes of the dancers, and permit the company as a whole to investigate ideas of space and movement in real-time without the need for the more didactic medium of pre-shot video or film.

As such, the participants could try new ideas while watching the shape and speed of their bodies without being concerned with direct aesthetic or surface detail, allowing a kind of escapism through the technology to an interaction that reduced the work to some of the purest aspects of dance and performance. For the spectators also, these multi-layered video backdrops to the action were a means of augmenting their reading of the piece, where palette or choreographed inserts of specific iconography amplified themes or the emotional context of the piece. For the designers and technicians, Pete Wallace and John Worthington, the project's emphasis on live input was a means to developing techniques alongside the production team which pushed the boundaries of the technology available. This jump forward in producing media for stage has certainly built strong foundations for further research in this area.

The direct 'action-response' aspects of the body-sensors used, and the gratification that this permitted for the dancers, seemed to entice greater movement through allowing them to amplify each gesture. This made being physical and having that engagement interpreted in a very modern and easily read way something exciting. As such, the emotional and mental expression emanating from the performers appeared more powerful and underlined the burgeoning sense of professionalism / pride amongst the participants as a whole.

In terms of the social aspects of building *More Please*, Butch Auntie's staff very much enjoyed meeting and working alongside the company as it was a valuable departure from the more service-oriented aspects of their more common commercial work. The opportunity to connect the audio visual impact so directly to the performers, while simultaneously finding out about their very individual interests and personalities was a unique period in the process and one which they are very keen to maintain if possible. While the social bonds made within the company are clearly very strong, Butch Auntie hope that they contributed to the sense of camaraderie experienced throughout. (Exemplified by a very warm party atmosphere amongst the participants after each performance).

The mobile nature of the digital content is an aspect which accompanies any kind of stage or venue-dynamic audio visual design, and so Butch Auntie have prepared their equipment to be as modular as possible for future work. Discussions have taken place about developing the means by which the technology could be used in care

settings with smaller audiences. The projection technology and the means by which media could be shown on interior/exterior walls is something Butch Auntie are very much practised for and able to cost/deploy with relative ease. Individual locations or settings may introduce challenges, but the experience the company has in finding solutions to these practical problems is very strong. Site-visits to residential settings or public spaces will allow for surveys to be made and changes introduced to maintain the desired impact where possible.

The rationale for the project centred on the need for strategic policy and practice to preserve good quality of life as people age in light of: i) demographic predictions of an increasingly ageing population in the UK in foreseeable future (Laing and Buisson 2006; Wanless, 2006; Joseph Rowntree, 2008; House of Lords, 2013); ii) the probable future increase in age-related and long-term ill-health conditions, including dementia (Chai, 2006; Commission for Healthcare Audit 2006; Knapp, Prince, Albanese, et al., 2007; DH, 2009; DH, 2012; Alzheimer's Society, 2012.); iii) an associated rise in public expenditure on health and social care (Hirsch 2005; Wittenberg, et al. 2012); and iv). To this end, the work was being evaluated in terms of the need for sustainable cost-effective interventions that have the capacity to support physical, mental and cognitive wellbeing and subsequent prolonged independence.

Partners

Adventure Partnership Collaborators

The Prosper Adventure permitted an existing partnership established at the Prosper experiment stage (StevensonThompson & Sidney De Haan Research Centre) to extend further to include a film maker (Open Productions) and latterly digital technology artists (Butch Auntie) eventuating in an innovative combination of expertise drawn from the arts and health professions.

The Moving Well project team

- Adventure partnership collaborators: Sian Stevenson and Jayne Thompson, artistic directors of StevensonThompson Dance Theatre Company; Simon Evans, film maker (Open Productions); Pete Wallace and Jon Worthington, digital artists/creative projection and live visuals programmers (Butch Auntie); and Trish Vella-Burrows, registered nurse and arts and health researcher (specialism: music in dementia care), and Lian Wilson, expressive dance therapist and arts and health research assistant, from the Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health, Canterbury Christ Church University.
- Project participants: performers from the Moving Memory Company (females aged between 50 and 82), visiting performers drawn from University of Kent student/graduate community, Gulbenkian youth theatre and the local community. Other participants over the duration included residents and staff from Connors House, Abbeyfield Kent Care Homes, Canterbury;

- Cross-Collaborative partners: In addition to the partnership collaborators working together for intense periods of time, they each took advantage of a number of opportunities to develop new contacts and initiate/establish new partnerships. These included:

Cross CCCU faculty collaborative partnerships:

- Faculty of Education: partnership with Dr Jonathan Barnes working on developing unique evaluation tools for measuring involvement and wellbeing of people with and without disabilities who are engaged with arts activities.
- Faculty of Health and Social Care: consultations with Prof. Jan Dewing re. refining/piloting the evaluation tools (above).

Cross University of Kent collaborative partnerships:

- Faculty of Humanities: School of Arts *Lifting the Curtain* public engagement – Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury. StevensonThompson/Moving Memory public workshop initiated the commencement of the *Moving Well* project.
- University of Kent CKP research centre: Professor Nicki Shaughnessy observed creative process/participant workshops. Chapter on StevensonThompson to be produced in a forthcoming publication.

External collaborative partnerships:

- Green Dandle Dance: a number of visits to GCD's London-based practice centre to observe and discuss their work and evaluations of work with people with dementia and to pilot the evaluation tool.
- Magpie Dance: a field trip to observe and discuss MD's working practices and evaluations of their work with young adults with learning disabilities and to pilot the evaluation tool.
- Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance: discussions about future collaborative work combining the working practices of StevensonThompson and TL, and physiological measures of impact undertaken by TL in their science laboratory.
- Theatre Royal, Margate: tour venue established and supported with additional Arts Council funding for a performance of StevensonThompson's *Moving on Moving and More Please*. Extended the remit of the project to include a different demographic in terms local community participation and audience attendance – 1 participant performer.
- De la Warr Pavilion, Bexhill: a collaborative workshop undertaken in partnership with DLWP facilitated by Sian Stevenson and Jayne Thompson combining the Moving Memory Company and a community dance class of older people from Bexhill and surrounding areas.
- Whitstable Warblers: a community singing group from which a small group of men were drawn to experience and contribute to the project as performers
- Turner Contemporary, Margate: visits to TC using the findings of the Moving Well project to inform a SDH Centre research project on mapping the arts as cultural capital in coastal towns

Prosper Adventure – Prospero

- Luke Pell Prospero – Meetings with Luke Pell in London, a visit to the University of Kent by Pell, and attendance at performance of *Moving On Moving/More Please* where Pell hosted the after show discussion.
- Ian Ross – Meeting with Ian Ross in London in July. Ross provided advice in relation to applying for additional funding to extend the possibilities of touring the production.

In-kind support Partnership collaborators:

Each of the adventure partnership collaborators contributed to the project over and above the Prosper funding allocation. This was an ambitious project with a series of objectives which were fundamentally exploratory in nature and technically demanding both in terms of process and outcome. This resulted in further and often unforeseen costs in time, equipment, and securing additional expertise (sound/projection) to fully develop the work in terms of high quality professional values, and innovative research/evaluative models.

These costs included for all collaborators extra time spent developing the creative elements, liaising and running additional workshops and rehearsals. For the artists involved, the merging of their respective creative practices was a great deal more time consuming than originally envisaged, for the researchers field trips; desk-based research; data collection activities; and report-design/writing was more involved than anticipated. Whilst some of the additional hours are easily accounted for (e.g. field trips; rehearsals; performance attendances), many others are difficult to quantify because they were undertaken as-and-when possible between other work. However, a conservative estimate of the real cost is at least three-times the allocated budget (c. £60,000)

Other in-kind support:

University of Kent:

- Use of studio workshop/rehearsal space for development of the performance, hosting collaboration partner meetings and facilitating data gathering for the evaluation of the project. Storage space.
- Use of technical equipment/documentation equipment throughout the duration of the process of the project.
- Design and printing of programmes.
- Student contributions: Performers stage manager, assistant stage manager, props, technical support. Sound and lighting operators.
- School of Arts – Film: Student film maker, plus equipment, plus time editing.

Gulbenkian Theatre:

- Technical intern to work on design of lighting and operation of lighting

Sidney De Haan Centre:

- The design and production of the interim evaluation handout.
- Data production - transcription of recorded focus group interviews.

Additional funding:

Arts and Humanities Research Council's research project on arts and cultural value. This was used to support an additional data gathering exercise at the De Le Warr Pavilion. Participants for which were generated from the Moving Memory Co.'s interactive community workshop.

Arts Council – facilitated venues as part of pilot tour of *Moving On Moving* and *More Please* in region – hire of technical equipment/expertise.

Numbers of participants and audience

The total number of people who took part in the project:

StevensonThompson artistic directors	2
Performers	24
Technical sound/lighting	2
Stage managing	2
Props	1
Butch Auntie digital artists	2
Open Productions film-maker	1
Student film-maker	1
Projectionist	1
Sound Artist	1
<i>Lifting the Curtain</i> workshop (participant)	25
DLWP Bexhill community workshop	25

The total number of opportunities (this is the number of workshops, rehearsals and performances in total in the whole project) for adventure participants to build on their personal skills and capacities and to explore notions of transportation and transformation was approximately 48.

Estimated live audience numbers reached: *Lifting the Curtain* – 30, Gulbenkian - c200, Theatre Royal – 60, DLWP – 25. TOTAL: c300

Estimated on line audience: Youtube, website – c100

Building Cultural Capacity

This project has shown that opportunities for intense engagement in an expressive and creative group dance/movement programme has significant potential to support cultural capacity, in the following ways:

- Building opportunities and participation in creative processes per se

- Building opportunities and participation among older people with and without disabilities
- Interweaving creative concepts (e.g. reminiscence; expressive representation) and media (dance/movement and DT)
- Broadening audiences (e.g. involving older people living in closed care settings; using creative activities as education tools for targeting prejudice and stereotyping)
- Artists' professional development (e.g. new experiences; multi-media collaborations/understanding the work of other artists; using alternative arts media to enhance work; sharing project evaluation process practices)
- The arts targeting national health and wellbeing issues

Regarding the latter point, the evidence in the literature shows that people who adopt a physically and mentally active lifestyle in young older-age (50+) are more likely to keep well and disability-free into older age. This factor has been a key driver in the escalation of health promotion programmes and initiatives across the UK, the conduits for which are widely diverse. Included in these, and based on a slowly growing understanding of the important relationship between health and wellbeing and cultural engagement, creative endeavour, productivity and aesthetic considerations, (Wikstrom, 2004; Clift, Camic, Chapman, et al., 2009), is the promotion of regular engagement with participatory and expressive arts. The contribution of the Moving Well project to this end relates to its capacity to engender engaged citizens, and to nurture curious, motivated, confident, reflective and empathetic individuals.

Audience Feedback

Feedback from the audiences at both performances has been extremely positive. There was an opportunity for audience members to complete feedback postcard. Samples of this feedback include comments:

This is not about age – it's about being human. I loved it!

What a delight – fun- clever- so many great 'moments... Very inspiring.

The juxtaposition and presence of the ages, the movement and memory was just created

beautifully.

I found is so moving, so funny, so sad, so joyful and uplifting.

... emotive, joyful and elegant to watch. It was enlightening and thought provoking...

Social impacts

The social impact outcomes of the project are far-reaching. They relate to the development and refining of a model of participatory performing arts that can contribute to: i) national targets for supporting older people's health and wellbeing and consequential prolonged independence into older age in light of an increasingly ageing population; ii) breaking down stereotyping of older people as declining in health and productivity; and iii) supporting a sense of wellness for people living with dementia in the community and in residential care homes.

The impact was assessed by team members from the SDH Centre using the following methods:

- Desk-based research looking at literature on
 - Demographics of older people
 - Older people's health and wellbeing issues
 - Arts in the context of health and wellbeing
 - The value of dance and movement-based activities for older people
 - The integration of digital technology in movement-based performing arts
 - Tools used for measuring the impact of such activities
- Consultations with the project team
- Consultations with key people from dance/movement and health agencies
- Focus group discussions with older dancers from the Moving Memory Company
- Observations of rehearsals and performances resulting from this project

A full report on the findings of the evaluation is being compiled at the time of writing. There follows a brief outline of some of the discoveries made in focus group discussion and observations.

Wellbeing

The following overarching benefits of engaging in the *Moving Well* process were expressed by dancers in focus group discussions. They felt:

- Supported, respected and validated as themselves
- Motivated and committed to the project
- A very strong sense of group cohesion; connected
- Affectionate and committed to one another
- An increasing sense of self-belief
- Increasingly creatively enabled and capable
- Challenged
- A sense of pleasure and achievement having met challenges
- Exercised mentally (inc. memory)

- Exercised physically
- Stronger physically
- Diverted from everyday stressors

Aked, et al. (2008) identified a five-point model of actions emphasising as important to engendering wellbeing: 'connectivity'; 'being with others'; 'being active'; 'noticing things'; 'maintaining learning'; and 'giving'. The following sample of comments made by dancers during focus group discussions demonstrates the project's capacity to reflect Aked et al.'s model:

Embodied engagement (connectivity):

'I think feeling good was the beginning for a lot of us, where we actually felt, our bodies were moving almost involuntary with that particular piece of music.'

'I feel ageless. I'm not 20, I'm not 30, I'm not 40, I'm not 70, I'm just ageless doing this, because I don't why that is, you just, you're just you. That's how I feel anyway.'

Human connection/commitment (being with others/giving):

'I think it's [a sense of connection with one another] because we've got sense of commitment to one another.'

'Everybody's there for us you know? You know the girls [fellow dancers] are gonna be there, at the end of the phone or the end of an e-mail or a bunch of flowers. It's really wonderful. It's a really close community.'

Achievement (maintaining learning):

'The accomplishment of it too. From being no dancer, to becoming a group of people dancing together.'

'I think I feel really proud about doing this.'

Motivation (noticing things):

P1: *'It's very much a part of who I am, I'm not the same person I was when I first came into this.'*

P2: *'I'm completely different.'*

Interviewer: *'You mean in terms of yourselves?'*

P3: *'Defiantly.'*

P4: *'My attitude towards things is different. I'm much more optimistic than I used to be. So yes I'd miss it terrible.'*

(P = participant)

A sense of physical and mental wellbeing, and cognitive stimulation (maintaining learning/being active):

'If you think about the word well-being...you can't always quantify feeling better or why you do. But for instance, coming along to rehearsals. I would do anything not to miss a rehearsal, if I feel awful like I did this morning I think well if I go to a rehearsal'

I'll feel better, and inevitably, how often do we say at the end of a rehearsal say oh I felt really tired, but at the end...'

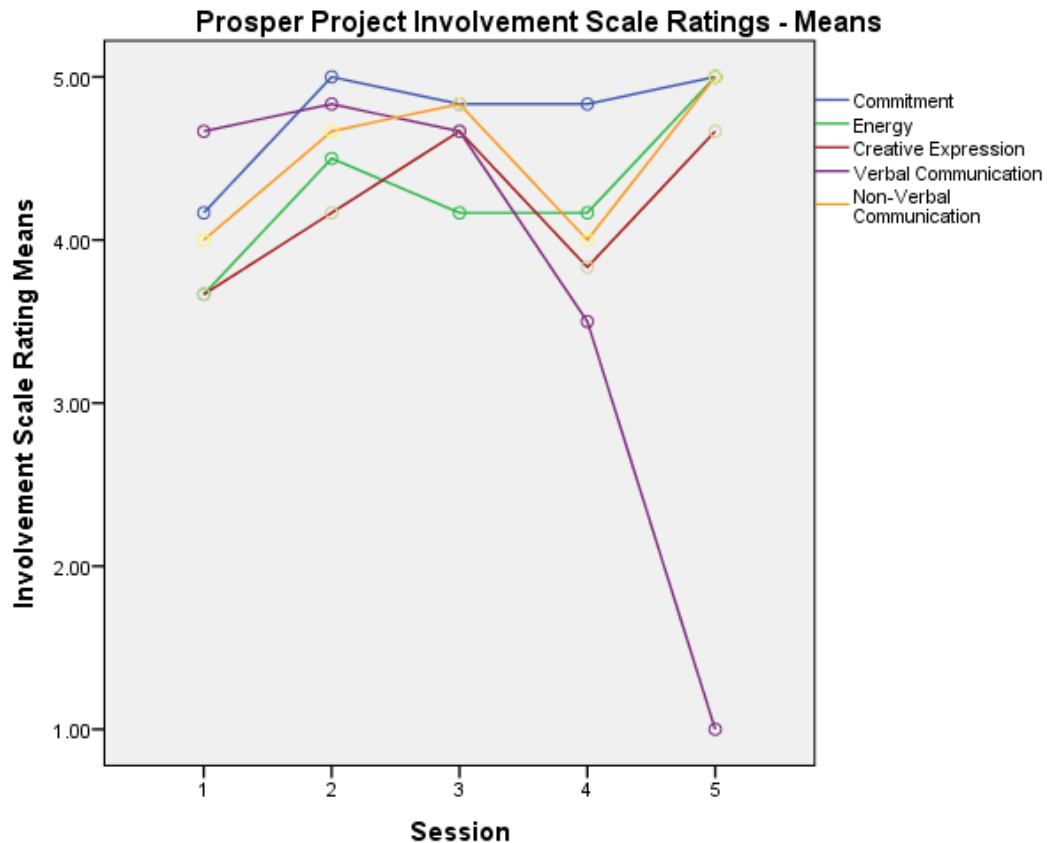
'Because you've exercised I suppose, you feel differently'.

'I think it has a tremendous effect on memory generally, not only here. Because I think here, um, we are encouraged to focus...we have to focus and once we focus we remember...and we can take that focusing into other things in life, that's what I've found - in life. And this is what helps to strengthen our memory'.

Quantifying levels of involvement

By working closely with the project team, and by analysing the data gathered, there emerged a better understanding of factors that can lead to a sense of transportation and transformation. It was important that any processes for measuring these factors should be transferable to residential care settings and to people with disabilities, particularly those associated with dementia. Time spent with the dancers and their facilitators led to a proposal to create an innovative, creative evaluation tool that would help to quantify mapped levels of these factors that appear to relate to commitment, energy, creativity and embodiment, and verbal and non-verbal communication over a period of time. Prototypes of the tool were discussed, designed, piloted and redesigned by the researchers and the organisations listed above (p. 2) and with older consultees in the community, two living with dementia.

The resultant tool, the Prosper Involvement Scale (working title) uses a five-point scale to measure commitment, energy, creativity and embodiment, and verbal and non-verbal communication, with 1 being very low and 5 being very high. The scale was developed over the course of the project and piloted over the course of five of the creative workshops, rehearsals and a performance undertaken by the Moving Memory Company.



The findings (above) show that across five observation sessions, the participants' levels of commitment, energy, creative expression, and non-verbal communication, were generally maintained or increased. The dips in creative expression and non-verbal communication at session four, which was the dress rehearsal for high-profile performance, might be explained by understandable nervousness among the participants and a focus on practical elements, i.e. being in the right place at the right time; getting the choreography and stage direction as accurate as possible. All elements were at their highest (apart from verbal communication) at session five, the performance.

The collective findings provide evidence of the *Moving Well* Adventure supporting positive transportation and transformation on many different levels across the performers, and audiences and the artists and researchers. In addition, on-going relationships between all of the partners are intended in order to further contribute to an understanding of the complex impacts of this type of project and to refine evaluation tools. Exciting time ahead!