

Evaluation Report

Get Dancing

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RMR



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About this report

This is an evaluation of the Get Dancing project, a collaboration between Showtown, LeftCoast CPP and House of Wingz.

The project developed the 'Blackpool Way' dance as a way of engaging people's interest in Blackpool's dance heritage through crowd sourcing dance moves, collaborative dance development, sharing through lockdown and culminating in a film.

Data for this Report came from observations, surveys and interviews with the project team, participants (at the various stages) and audience members at the film launch.

Section titles in quotation marks are quotes from participants or team members.

Get Dancing: Evaluation Summary

Get Dancing drew on Blackpool's place within popular dance culture to crowdsource a new social dance, which was developed, shared and then filmed with the communities of town

The project aimed to engage communities in something fun – particularly in a challenging time, raise awareness of Blackpool's dance heritage, and showcase the quality of work Blackpool partners can do when they work together.

Get Dancing achieved many of its aims:

- All those involved felt extremely positive about the experience, had fun and gained a sense of connection.
- Everyone in the project felt they'd learnt about Blackpool's dance heritage
- The delivery partnership was extremely effective and not only delivered efficiently, but also acted as a support and growth network for those in it through a difficult time.

However, so far impact has been largely limited to Blackpool and to those most closely involved. There is further work to do to reach all the original project aims.

What worked

- Adapting to lockdown
- Trust and openness
- Drawing on a range of networks
- Clear ways of working
- A strong, relevant brand
- Commitment to a high-quality work
- "Working bloody hard".

The challenges

- "Just a nightmare of a time to do it"
- Capacity issues
- Challenges of multiple leadership.

Recommendations

- Partners should **work together to ensure that Get Dancing continues** and all the **assets of the project are used to their full potential**.
- Seek to **include participants, as well as all partners, in the next stage of the project** to bring in their ideas and learning.

Partners should build on the learning of:

- The **value of a brand** in bringing disparate elements of a complex project together
- **Knowing what a good partner looks and feels like.**

Who did it reach?



119,026
total reach



741 in person
participants



Tiny
children
to 75+



1,802
digital
participants

Who made it happen?



20+ delivery
team



2,320 artist
hours



125 dance videos
submitted

Impact on awareness

87% of the audience felt more aware of Blackpool's heritage after watching the film.

89% more aware of Blackpool's role in international dance.

87% of people said they were more likely to visit Showtown as a result of seeing the film.

96% of the audience think the film is something people outside Blackpool need to see.

1. “A new social dance with a twist”

“it had to be very, very Blackpool”

House of Wingz

Get Dancing drew on Blackpool’s place within popular dance culture to crowdsource a new social dance, which was developed, shared and then filmed with the communities of town.

Given the continuing anxieties around Covid, it was seen as “an antidote to the pandemic”¹ aimed in part at getting people active, reducing isolation and increasing pride in the town.

The project was delivered by LeftCoast CPP, Showtown², Blackpool’s new museum of fun and entertainment, and House of Wingz³, a dance company producing work for theatre, festivals and events, all working in partnership.

The project was originally conceived in two parts – *A New Dance for Blackpool* and *Dancing In The Streets* – however, Covid restrictions meant that the later became *Doorstep Dance*.

Funding for the project came from National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Lottery Communities Fund, with Arts Council England providing support for *Doorstep Dance*.



¹ Quote from <https://leftcoast.org.uk/getdancing/>

² See <https://www.showtownblackpool.co.uk/>

³ See <https://www.skoolofstreet.com/>

1.1. Blackpool and popular dance

Blackpool has strong historical connections with popular, social and competitive dance, in particular ballroom and Northern Soul. The original Central Pier was designed with a large open-air dance space and the Tower Ballroom is famous as one of the locations for the BBC's ever-popular *Strictly Come Dancing*.

In the inter-war years, novelty dance crazes like *The Blackpool Walk* attracted people to the many local ballrooms. *The Blackpool Dance Festival* started in 1920 and continues today – and the town has hosted *Breakin' Convention*, the international festival of hip hop dance.

1.2. Project activities

1.2.1. A new dance for Blackpool

Composed by Callum Harvie, the music to accompany the new dance for Get Dancing was inspired by Blackpool's dance past, drawing on the 1938 hit *The Blackpool Walk*.

People were asked to submit their dance moves through TikTok – the video social network that has spawned a number of dance crazes – and via the Get Dancing website (leftcoast.org.uk/getdancing/).

There were 125 submissions from around the world and House of Wingz took these moves to shape the new dance, *The Blackpool Way*. They then created a set of tutorials to teach people how to do the dance.

Originally, this phase was to finish with a mass participation event on Blackpool seafront in October 2021. However, it became clear

that ongoing Covid restrictions would not make this possible. The decision was taken to shoot a film instead and use this as the end point for the project.

1.2.2. Doorstep Dance

Initially this was to be *Dancing in the Streets* and would share *The Blackpool Way* with local communities through taster sessions, dance parties and food sharing. As well as literally “dancing in the streets” of local neighbourhoods, participants would have the opportunity to take part in a live performance.

However, because of the Covid restrictions this evolved into *Doorstep Dance* which launched on 29th April 2021 (International Dance Day). This was a more lowkey and scaled down approach to teaching *The Blackpool Way* that took place on people's doorsteps. It involved inflatable igloos, beach balls and taking teaching the dance into the streets and green spaces of the town.

TIMELINE FOR GET DANCING

- **DEC 2020 - FEB 2021**
Crowd sourcing submissions for moves.
- **MAR - APR 2021**
Development of the dance; creation of assets for learning the dance.
- **29 APR 2021**
Doorstep dance launched;
The Blackpool Way starts being taught.
- **SUMMER 2021**
Tutorials with different groups and some community events (Covid allowing); Wash commissioned to collaborate on the film production.
- **AUG 2021**
Dance showcased around the town and at Blackpool Dance Festival.
- **26 - 29 SEP 2021**
Film shot takes place at locations throughout Blackpool.
- **5 DEC 2021**
Main film launch event at The Old Electric in Blackpool.
- **8 APRIL 2022**
Film released on YouTube and website – including Get Dancing: The Journey, a “making of” documentary.

1.2.3. The film

The Get Dancing film is a celebration of *The Blackpool Way*, the diversity of dance in the town and Blackpool itself. It shows a journey through Blackpool to the accompaniment of the new music. The main character encounters different dance groups who perform their own versions of *The Blackpool Way* in their own dance style – for example, he first meets a group of young ballet dancers on the steps of the Whittaker Dance School. People appearing and dancing in the film were mainly recruited from the public, alongside some professional and community dancers. The various scenes take place in locations throughout the town, including recognisable ones such as the North Pier and the Winter Gardens.

The film was premiered at The Old Electric in Blackpool in December 2021 and released to the public in April 2022 (via YouTube and the website). The April release was accompanied by *Get Dancing: The Journey*, a “behind the scenes” feature that explores the development of the project, as well as a new set of tutorial videos.⁴

1.3. Developing the dance

At the start of the project, there was a clear brief around creating the dance, teaching it to people and then having a final performance. The pandemic changed this – and the trajectory of the project.

The focus on crowdsourcing the dance opened up the opportunity for contributions from around the world but presented potential challenges as well. Anyone could send something in regardless of their dance skills and without knowing anything about Blackpool.

⁴ View the film and feature at leftcoast.org.uk/getdancing/

There was an inherent tension between trying to ‘go viral on Tik Tok’ (universal, impersonal) and something that was grounded in Blackpool (specific, hyper-local).

Although fewer videos were submitted than was initially hoped, House of Wingz were able to knit together the different elements, allowing people to feel like they had contributed to the final dance.

The relationship between the dance and the music was utterly integral to the project, House of Wingz knew what style they wanted:

“we wanted a sample of the original [Blackpool Walk]... but ... [with] the vibe to be electro swing... so we gave Callum⁵ examples of... [the] music that we work with... [and] what Blackpool things we really want [to] feature in it... it needed to let people know where it was from... it had to be very, very Blackpool”

House of Wingz

In shaping the dance itself, House of Wingz found a balance between inclusivity and high quality. It had to be as inclusive as possible – anyone should be able to make the moves – which changed House of Wingz’s usual ways of working. Normally they knew what sort of age groups or sets of people they were working with. With Get Dancing, the dance had to be open to anyone. And this inclusivity had to be achieved without compromising on what was produced – it had to remain high quality.

The pandemic changed plans around how the dance could be taught. How could a social dance flourish at a time when social

⁵ Composer Callum Harvie

contact was reduced? The combination of *Doorstep Dance* and the dance tutorials overcame this.

Finally there is the sense that the dance evolved in the making of the film. This happened through the very process of capturing the dance on film but also House of Wingz choreographing for film rather than live performance as originally intended. Involving the different dance groups in the film meant further re-interpretation, and learning for the team as no one had previously made a dance film.

Throughout the process, the dance and film demonstrated three underlying values:

- **Inclusivity:** Involving a wide range of people in the cast showcased the inclusivity of the dance.
- **Located in place:** The locations rooted it in Blackpool and its place in the history of dance.
- **High quality:** The film itself was a professional, engaging and high-quality final output.

1.4. Legacy

Though Get Dancing formally finished in 2021, it has an ongoing legacy.

At time of writing, there are discussions around short snippets of the film being used by Visit Blackpool in their promotional marketing.

As Showtown won't open their new physical venue until 2023, *The Blackpool Way* is one approach they will use to engage people during 2022. Their temporary home is an empty shop and here they will teach people the dance moves as part of their educational programme. House of Wingz are using the project as a calling card of their work as well as recording new dance tutorials.

For LeftCoast, Get Dancing is a tool to engage people in the new communities in which they will work. Additionally, they are exploring other possible places and spaces to show the film – for example, around the switching on of the Blackpool Lights.

Get Dancing has created a stronger partnership between all three organisations. It is hoped that *The Blackpool Way* has a longer-term legacy, becoming more of a movement asking people the question, "This Is Our Way, What's Yours?". House of Wingz are already using it in this way, working to encourage others to learn and then teach it.

2. “Fun and light after a difficult time”

“It was brilliant to join everyone... to get involved after such a long time in lockdown”

Film Participant Survey

The project team wanted Get Dancing to be fun and inspiring for local residents and encourage them to get involved, as well as bringing them new connections and opportunities.

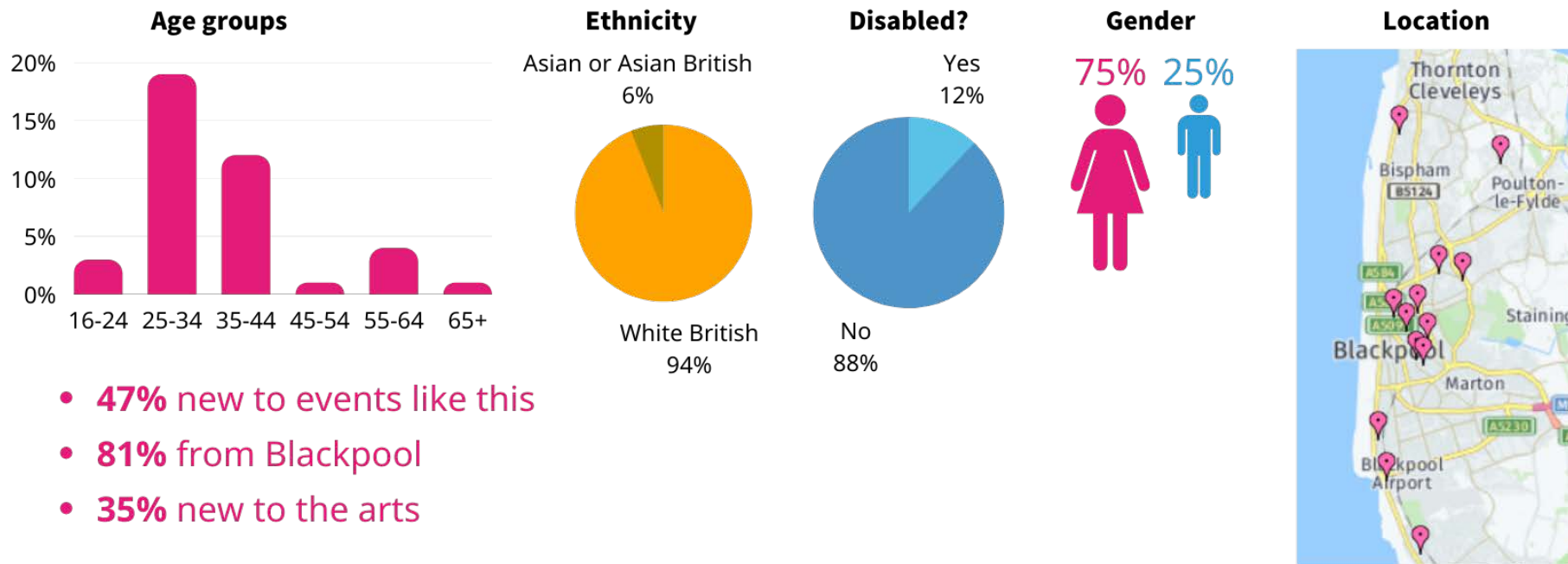
This became even more important during the pandemic. There was a need both for something to uplift people during a difficult time and to overcome isolation.⁶ In summary:

- Get Dancing reached 119,026 people, 1,154 in-person and 117,872 digitally
- Participants from communities around Blackpool:
 - Had a great time during a time where they needed a lift
 - Tried something new and got a sense of achievement
 - Gained a sense of connection with others
 - Want to stay involved with Get Dancing and share the dance further.

⁶ Data for this section is largely derived from 82 audience survey responses collected after the film, and 17 participant survey responses. The title is a quote from a team member



2.1. Who was involved?



- **47%** new to events like this
- **81%** from Blackpool
- **35%** new to the arts

Figure 1: Film Participant demographics including map of postcodes

2.2. People had fun and were uplifted

“It is good for the mind & body. Gives you the feel good factor.”

Film Participant Survey

It is clear that people who attended or got involved with a Get Dancing event had a great time doing so. When asked what three words they would use to describe the Get Dancing event, the most

common response was ‘fun’, with other popular words being ‘enjoyable’, ‘brilliant’ and ‘exciting’ as shown in the word cloud.

Team members observed audiences and participants having a good time and enjoying themselves:

“The project made everyone forget the horror of the world at the time and just made us realise all we truly need to be happy is each other, music and dance.”

Project Team Survey



Figure 2: Film participants - what three words would you use to describe Get Dancing?

This was part of the plan and engineered into the design:

“... there is a real blurring of the line between audience and performer. People were joining in, kids were playing in the fountain... there was a dog. Some of the participants brought bags of dance skills others brought bags of enthusiasm...”

Project Team Reflection Log

“We were regularly told the project came at the right time, some fun and light after a difficult time, and the SOS bus, the igloo, the beach balls as well as our branding colours were all designed to help us bring that fun... lots of smiley happy people, even when they were freezing and being rained on!”

Project Team Survey

People also rated the film very highly in the feedback. 100% of audience members found the film fun to watch, and 100% of audience and participants would recommend it to family and friends. A fantastic achievement considering the fairly large sample size.

“Just to say thank you for an enjoyable experience”

Film Audience Member Survey

Over 40% of participants also called the event ‘fun’ and ‘exciting’, and nearly a quarter called it ‘awesome’, ‘brilliant’ or ‘amazing’.

“Thoroughly enjoyed it - great to see positive side of Blackpool and its residents.”

Film Audience Member Survey

2.3. Trying something new

“Pushed me out of my comfort zone”

Film Audience Member Survey

Get Dancing has delivered something new to the people of Blackpool. Film participants were new to this sort of experience,

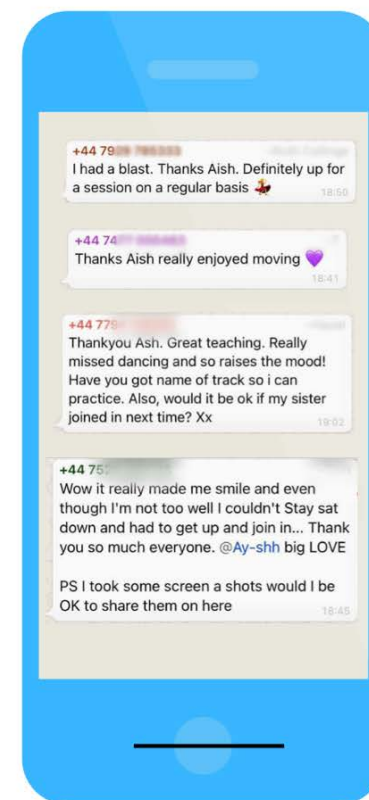


Figure 3: Text messages received by House of Wingz

with 47% never having been involved with something similar before, and 35% being new to the arts in general⁷.

With Doorstep Dance, it was clearly totally new to many of the community members who came out and joined in. For some, their confidence visibly grew over time.

A story from Doorstep Dance

“One of the young people involved in the sessions, is really shy... She says she's always shy but has enjoyed the dance workshops and that's evidenced by a number of things.

She is the only child that has worn the t-shirt given to her at the start of the doorstep sessions every week. She has danced with me on the outskirts of the group, danced by herself on the edge, and although she doesn't always respond directly to encouragement to participate, she observes and joins in, in her own time.

She knew the dance when performed to the parents at the end, and although wasn't in the main group doing it she quite happily did it at the back.

When we said at the end that they could dance the dance again with a bigger group at The Grange Festival on the 4th June, she was joining in the group getting excited. She would be easily lost in the group that was predominantly very communicative and confident, but for me she's the real win...

Don't know if you noticed but she eventually did a curtsy and a big thumbs up at the end too!”

Team Reflection Notes

“It was great to see people who were reluctant to get involved engage with the dance and just have fun and a laugh.”

Project Team Survey

Many people felt like they had learnt something new. For some this was a motivation to attend, saying the events sounded exciting and worth joining in.

“I want to be a drag queen and this was my first time getting to do it for something!”

Film Participant Survey

People also stayed involved. All of the sessions and opportunities for people to get involved in the project have had a really positive response. Lots of people who engaged early in the initial call out were still involved in the project by the end.

2.4. A sense of connection with others

“It's joyful and helped against loneliness”

Film Audience Member Survey

The overwhelming majority of people said the best thing about being involved with Get Dancing was meeting new people, with special mention of the friendly staff, crew, dancers and volunteers.

They valued being brought together as a community and found a sense of belonging from taking part.

⁷ 35% of participants had not engaged in arts and culture in the last 12 months.

“meeting people... dancing... having a sense of belonging.”

Film Participant Survey

People mention how good it is to connect with others after the pandemic:

“It was brilliant to join everyone with same energy to get involved after such a long time in lock down.”

Film Participant Survey

“Feedback from parents was that some of their children had not engaged in group activities for over a year so were nervous to take part, this was seen as a positive way to start that engagement for them.”

Project Team Reflection Log

“The pride of being involved in something bigger than themselves, even having a small part in the film, the feeling at the film launch for participants, was really positive and pleased to have been involved.”

Project Team Survey

69% of participants said they had met new people as a result of the activity they took part in – in many cases more than one – and many of them were hopeful these friendships would continue outside of the activity.

However, there was a need to tread carefully and the Team recognised this in their approach:

“the lockdowns had quickly made people scared of participating with others and we had to gently reintroduce

that to people. It was interesting to witness that over the 4 weeks of Doorstep [Dance].”

Project Team Reflection Log

This took into account the extreme isolation some reported – for example one woman said Doorstep Dance was the first thing she had done outside the house in nine months.

2.4.1. The filming

The three intense days of filming – with a cast of over 120 participants plus dancers, choreographers and filming crew – was another aspect of “connection”.

Everyone involved commented on the warmth and camaraderie involved: in this.

“I think the memory I would take away is the filming days. Watching people feel part of something bigger, the conversations you have at 6 in the morning on a windy north pier and the commonalities people find, like the pride Blake’s [the lead dancer’s] grandma had in him when she was chaperoning.”

Project Team Survey

“I observed on the filming day a real sense of comradery between the participants involved in the filming - there was a real sense of being part of something.”

Project Team Survey

Defining social isolation and loneliness

Part of the funding for Get Dancing aimed to address issues of social isolation.

Social isolation is “an objective measure of the number of contacts that people have. It is about the quantity and not quality of relationships.”⁸ You can decide to have few social contacts and if you feel isolated you could go out and meet more people. “Social isolation is not necessarily a negative experience. Loneliness is.”⁹

Loneliness is a more personal and difficult feeling based more on a mismatch in your relationships with people. It can be defined as “a subjective and unwelcome feeling which results from a mismatch in the quality and quantity of social relationships we have and those that we desire”¹⁰

The two ideas are deeply inter-related, each can change over the course of someone’s life as their life unfolds and they may have a negative impact on someone’s wellbeing and health¹¹.

In the context of the Covid pandemic, someone could maintain social contact via phone or Zoom – or see their family everyday – but they may feel lonely because of the impact of social distancing and the other restrictions.

2.5. Continuing to be involved

As well as having a great time, people were very keen to be involved in more events in the future. 100% of participants want more activities in their area like the one they attended. The chart below shows audience responses when asked if they would like to be involved in next steps with Get Dancing.

Unsurprisingly the easiest to do – that is, recommending the dance to friends was the most popular option. However flash mobs and dance parties at joint second both require participation. Only a small percent of the audience saying they definitely would not want to be part of that next step.

“Having listened to participants reflections on this project I believe that it really forged a sense of community cohesion, the timing of the project was really significant because people felt disconnected because of Covid 19.”

Project Team Survey

⁸ Loneliness and isolation – understanding the difference and why it matters, <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/loneliness-research-and-resources/loneliness-isolation-understanding-the-difference-why-it-matters/>

⁹ Campaign to End Loneliness’s The Psychology of Loneliness (July 2020), p 10, https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Psychology_of_Loneliness_FINAL_REPORT.pdf

¹⁰ Perlman, D., & Peplau, Theoretical approaches to loneliness (1982) quoted in Campaign to End Loneliness’s The Psychology of Loneliness (July 2020), p 10, https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Psychology_of_Loneliness_FINAL_REPORT.pdf

¹¹ For example, see Mind’s discussion of Loneliness, <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/about-loneliness/>

What next steps for the project would you be interested in?

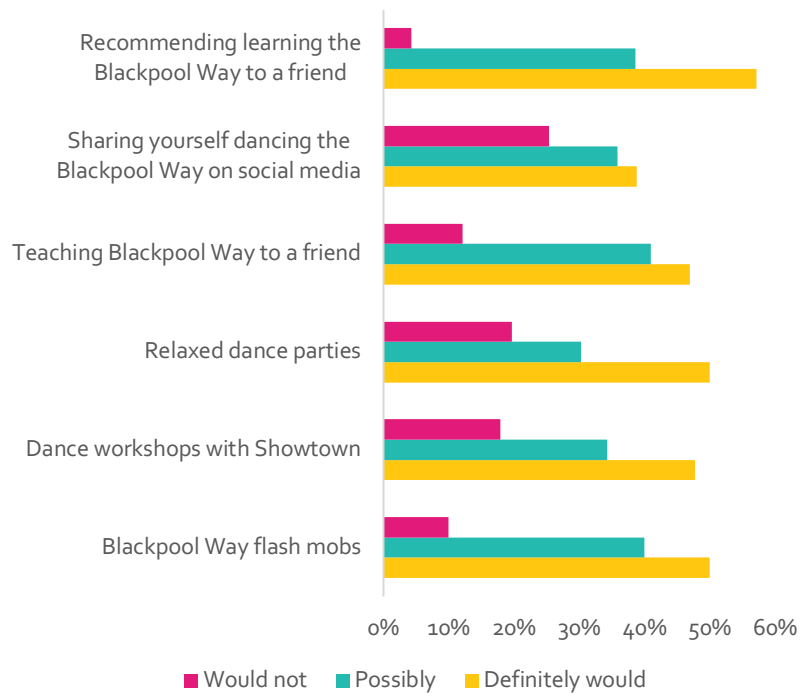


Figure 4: Audience response to next step ideas



3. “Beyond the Ballroom”

“Get Dancing belongs in Blackpool, it is the perfect showtown.”

Film Participant Survey

Changing perceptions of Blackpool was a key aim of the project. This included highlighting the heritage of dance in the town, and sharing its richness ‘Beyond the Ballroom’.

With the start of the pandemic and local responses, this broadened into telling a wider story of Blackpool and its joyful, creative response to adversity.

We find that Get Dancing:

- Made people in Blackpool more aware of Blackpool’s heritage, particularly around dance
- Helped participants and audience to see Blackpool in a new light
- Enabled people to share their different stories of the town
- Increased professional dancers’ belief in the possibility of taking part in high quality work in the town
- Raised awareness of the partners and their work.



3.1. Showcasing Blackpool's dance heritage

There is strong evidence that the Get Dancing film has helped to raise awareness of Blackpool's heritage, especially in relation to dance. 87% of audience members felt they were more aware of Blackpool's heritage after watching the Get Dancing film, with 89% more aware of Blackpool's role in international dance.

This is echoed in the feedback from the Team Members – who had all discovered a new side or depth to the dance history of Blackpool – beyond their particular dance style:

“I've always respected my hometown's heritage and the impact it has on dance and creativity itself, this project truly made me realise just how much dance is integrated within on our seaside town and how it is within our blood!”

Dancer/Choreography, Project Team Survey

“[I've learnt] ...Just how impactful dance has been throughout the history and decades of this town and just how much of our heritage is filled with dance.”

Project Team Survey

“I do feel that the project has helped me to understand the importance and significance of dance in Blackpool in a way that I had not considered before.”

Project Team Survey

But was also true for participants:

“It's perfect, the music, the dancing, it's like visualising Blackpool's history.”

Film Participant Survey

“Dance has always been a big part of Blackpool... the Tower Ballroom, the shows, theatres and lots more styles of dancing.”

Film Participant Survey

3.2. Reflecting the spirit of Blackpool

The overwhelming sense is that the film has successfully captured the spirit of Blackpool, with 100% of audience members saying that the film reflected the town. 96% of audience members think that the film is something that people outside Blackpool need to see to further spread the message.

“It taught me more about Blackpool... challenging the negative stereotypes we hear.”

Film Audience Member Survey

97% feel more proud of Blackpool as a result of the film or being involved in the project:

“The film is a gamechanger for Blackpool and all of its wonderful creative talent here today. The future is dance - a new generation of quality performers and artists. So proud to be from Blackpool watching the film - energetic and inspired.”

Film Audience Member Survey

“Top show here today. Hope you get the high-profile recognition you deserve, clear use of heritage venues mixed with funky dance.”

Film Audience Member Survey

Reflecting both Blackpool and its dance heritage was hardwired into the way the film in terms of style and settings. But also in the choreographers’ specific decision to include a range of dance styles – both modern and more traditional – that demonstrated the diversity of dance in the town.

“[the film process]... has felt very 'Blackpool' and feels like it encompasses everything that is amazing about the town and the people in it.”

Project Team Reflection Log

3.3. Changing perceptions of dance in Blackpool

There is some evidence the project changed people’s perceptions around opportunities for developing dance careers in Blackpool. Previously this was seen as very limited to small scale work or particular dance styles.

“When you’re a professional dancer especially within the commercial dance aspect you are fed time and time again that London is the only place to be to try and truly make it, but you can make it anywhere... leaving your mark... where your roots are to me is truly memorable.”

Project Team Survey

“being able to meet so many incredible and talented people through the project has really opened my eyes about who lives in the area and how passionate people are.”

Project Team Survey

House of Wingz were happy with the way that the film portrays the production of a range of dance forms at a professional level in Blackpool. This demonstrates to the public that the town isn’t just about ballroom dancing. This is particularly key in attracting and retaining young and diverse (dance) talent in the town.

3.4. Awareness of Showtown and other partners

Attending the Get Dancing film launch acted as a great introduction for people to Showtown and this will hopefully remain the case as the film is shared more widely.

87% of people said they were more likely to visit Showtown as a result of seeing the film.

People also recognised and want to support the various partners:

“[I came to] support House of Wingz and LeftCoast and Showtown.”

Film Audience Member Survey

“Great performance at the end from House of Wingz.”

Film Audience Member Survey

In addition, the project was clearly presented as a collaboration between the three partners, ensuring that the contributions of each were recognised:

“We are clear that [the] press and media about Get Dancing recognises all three partners and that Blackpool can see this as a successful partnership project.”

Showtown, Project Team Reflection Log

In terms of awareness and visibility, many benefits arose from the strong, inclusive brand developed from the start of the project. The brand was taken very seriously by all partners and developed by the designer to include both heritage and dance styles allusions and a modern feel:

“We have been fairly successful regarding creating brand recognition. Whilst we had a fairly rigid design style initially, we made the decision to evolve this throughout due to the yearlong lifespan of the project.”

Designer, Project Team Reflection Log

Partners are aware of the benefits of the brand, and recognise that the next stage is to build on the Get Dancing film, and the dance to maintain and raise awareness:

“Creating brand recognition is now our mission as a collective”

Project Team Reflection Log

The strength of the brand and visual identity present a foundation on which to build for the future.



4. “Shared passion and common goals”

“Get Dancing has never felt a chore or a drag. The project has spirit.”

Project Team Reflection Log

In bringing together the three partners, the project had the potential to establish new ways of working and positively impact team members.

We find that the project:

- o Developed the partners’ practice in terms of flexibility, working collaboratively and in a range of skills and artistic practice areas.
- o Fostered new professional connections and opportunities.
- o Saw a strong partnership built between the three lead organisations that will be the basis for future work together.

Opposite page: Screenshots from Get Dancing: The Journey, a tutorial and the film



4.1. Developing practice

Get Dancing as a project involved every member of the team stepping outside their comfort zones and doing new things.

This could be in specific areas – for example most had never been involved in making a film and no one had made a dance film before. But also the need to adapt and change plans on an almost weekly basis at the start as the full implications of the lockdown became clear.¹²

Different types of benefits arose for team members:

“On a personal level I have managed to move my practice away from some of the more commercial work I have done in the past and concentrate on projects I enjoy... as a result I have also made the decision to enrol on a master’s course to fill in some blanks in my digital abilities.”

Designer, Project Team Reflection Log

There was huge growth for House of Wingz. From the young people who had a chance to experience the making of a film to the organisation itself benefiting greatly from the involvement of experienced socially engaged dance specialist Manuela Benini as a mentor.

“... definitely achieved [professional development]. Especially working with Manuela, Andy and Tina¹³. I have found all three of these individuals have asked me questions that have challenged me and ultimately lead to new ways of thinking.”

¹² Data from this section mostly comes from team reflective logs with 22 responses from 10 team members, and a Project Team Survey with 12 responses as well as interviews and observation at team meetings.

House of Wingz, Project Team Survey

Other dancers gained from stretching their practice:

“I got to explore different aspects of creating with the goal [of] longevity within the dance [so it] could be danced by generation after generation and I think [we] achieved that.”

Dancer/Choreographer, Project Team Survey

“My quality of work only grew throughout the project, as each strand of the project developed so did my quality of work and input.”

Project Team Survey

“I found that working as an associate artist in this project made me work also in a new way, where I am encouraging thinking and inspiring with ideas and references, rather than having to come up with solutions myself.”

Dance Mentor, Project Team Reflection Log

Other partners gained skills in community engagement particularly from Doorstep Dance and film engagement work:

¹³ Andy from WASH films was the film maker. WASH were selected for the level of professionalism of their work. Tina is the Creative Director of LeftCoast.

“The project also developed my ability to work collaboratively and strengthened my ability to include community voices and input into my work.”

House of Wingz, Project Team Survey

“Going out into specific communities changed my outlook on how we expect people to engage with our activities and put more focus on making our activities easier to reach.”

Showtown, Project Team Survey

4.2. Fostering networks and work opportunities

Many of the team made new connections to their professional networks as part of this project.

“[one of our team] has made a great connection with the Winter Gardens and the lead organiser of the Dance Festivals. Through this new relationship she has been able to get HOW [House of Wingz] in to teach the dance at the next festival alongside tickets for their crew to see some of the competition. We have been trying to make a connection like this for years.”

Project Team Reflection Log

For House of Wingz the connection with Manuela Benini¹⁴ had a direct networking impact from the contacts she brought:

“We have developed a great relationship with Manuela, we are now working as a company with her in the Queens Platinum Jubilee Parade.”

House of Wingz, Project Team Survey

For others it was just the range of people they met that had impact:

“I met different people that work a lot more behind the scenes but have such a great impact on the project itself. I met different artists on the actual shoot itself, talking, connecting and growing with them throughout the week of filming, was amazing!”

Project Team Survey

Overall it is notable that every single person involved in the making of the project felt they’d gained in connections and opportunities. This could be connections into new areas or improving the quality and reach of their networks.

4.3. Better partnership working

It is clear the project has successfully built a strong partnership between the three lead partners – LeftCoast, Showtown and House of Wingz. This is a partnership based in trust around shared aims and values, but also around shared commitment to hard work and getting the job done. It is clear from the feedback quite how strong this is and how much it has arisen from seeing how everyone copes through adversity.

¹⁴ Manuela worked with House of Wingz as the mentor/ advisor to them in their role as artistic lead.

“I think the shared passion for the project and common goals have made the experience a positive one. I feel this is has translated into the bright, enthusiastic content we have created as a group.”

Project Team Reflection Log

This is a set of trusting relationships which run through all levels of the organisations, not just at the top. All the leads commented both on how well the partnership went, and on how proud they were of their team’s delivery within this.

“This experience makes me proud of my team and the way we all get stuck into resolving creative dilemmas, keeping crew and extras happy, ensuring our socials were busy and doing our best to respect the people who offered up their venues/spaces for our location work.”

Project Team Reflection Log

Some of the learning was around fundamentally understanding each other’s strengths and challenges in terms of capacity. This allowed a sharing out of work – particularly at key ‘crunch points’ when time was of the essence.

“The levels of cooperation and support between the partners and the creatives has been uniformly excellent... Intuitively people have been playing to their strengths.”

Project Team Reflection Log

Everyone involved has full confidence that they can continue to work together into the next stage of the project

Opposite page: Screensgrabs from Get Dancing: The Journey and the film

To date, it hasn’t been possible to see how this co-working has affected perceptions of the partners’ ability to work together, or the impact on funders’ likelihood to invest in similar projects – all part of the aims of the project. This is something which would be more likely to emerge over time. It should be tracked and reflected on by the group as they move to the next stage of sharing of the film and resources.



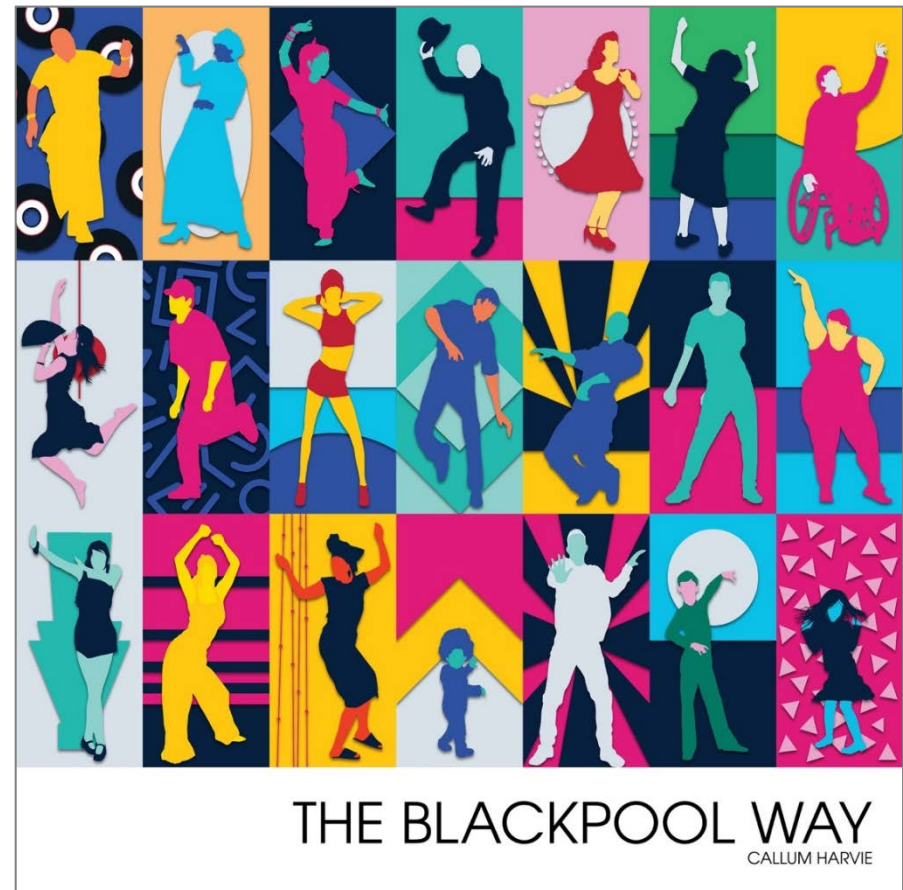
5. Conclusions and Learning

5.1. Conclusions

Get Dancing has clearly landed well in the communities of Blackpool, all those who have been involved are extremely positive about the experience, having fun and gaining a sense of connection with others in the project. It has started discussions about Blackpool's dance heritage and everyone in the project felt they'd learnt at least one new thing about this. The delivery partnership was extremely effective and not only delivered efficiently, but also acted as a support and growth network for those in it through a difficult time.

Impact has been largely limited to Blackpool and to those most closely involved. There is still a lot to do to fully reach all the aims set out in the original Story of Change, particularly in the sharing of the engagement, new narratives, and heritage awareness beyond Blackpool.

The film, as well as the accompanying material (e.g. the 'Making of' film, the tutorials etc) and the dance itself offer the way to do this. The partnership which delivered the project, and the networks and contacts generated by the project is clearly a strong vehicle to take this forward. This needs to be planned through and treated as a project in its own right – 'Phase 2' – to give it the focus it needs. Treating this phase of the work with a fraction of the energy and commitment given so far will undoubtedly multiply the impacts into a far wider community.



5.2. What worked?

“the ability to adapt to anything because we were in it together, and the laughter, lots and lots of laughter.”

Team member survey

5.2.1. Adapting to lockdown

Covid 19 and related lockdowns could have led to the project being delayed indefinitely or abandoned. However the whole project team took the attitude that it should carry on, and adapted every element as they went along. The crowd-sourcing went from a street-based exercise to online via Tik-Tok, the practice from high streets to cul-de-sacs where people were isolating at home and could join in on their doorstep, the final performance transferred to a more lockdown flexible film.

This adaptation was something that everyone in the team embraced and worked with. They all felt they learnt a lot from it, particularly valuing each others' 'problem solving skills on the go'.

“That willingness to find a new way forward for the work was a real strength. there are lots of times that partners or artists could have stuck their heels in but nobody did.

Project Team Survey

5.2.2. Trust and openness

“Openness to shifting ideas to suit changing situations, openness to trying out other people’s creative ideas, and willingness to try different approaches and new processes.”

Project Team Survey

This was at the core of success, including the recognition and respect for the skills of others, and feeling able to be open about what each didn't know. This meant the team members felt able to ask for help from others where needed, and also challenge and expand their practice through collective reflection and a joint ambition to deliver a project of high quality

5.2.3. Drawing on a range of networks

The project vastly gained through the range of connections offered by such an array of partners. For example, while the majority of audience members found out about Get Dancing through social media (62%), showing the success of the social media campaign, another huge 'reach' was through word of mouth from the partners. The variety of different disciplines, and thus contacts and points of influence helped all three organisations reach more people and get things done quicker.

5.2.4. Clear ways of working and internal communications

The strength of the team communications was a key success factor in the project, mentioned by all team members. This was supported by the use of Slack as a discussion space, as well as online team meetings. There were also felt to be clear roles and responsibilities and good planning for practical logistics,

particularly around delivery moments. Although there were capacity challenges, one of the benefits of the strong communication and the trust was that different people could pick up the bulk of delivery as others found themselves time-challenged over the long period.

“For the first time in my working life, I felt that on this project, there was someone to support with every detail. It helped things run smoothly and also brought a wider sense of support and togetherness which was really great after the lockdowns of 2020.”

Project Team survey.

5.2.5. A strong, relevant brand

The project team took the decision to have a strong brand visually, and in terms of the feel of the project overall. The ‘look’ – a mix of bright modern colours with images from the wide heritage of dance in Blackpool linked to the dance itself and the music, both of which drew on the dance and dance music heritage of Blackpool but with a modern ‘vibe’. The colours and feel of the brand were then thoroughly threaded through all the project branding and digital engagement.

“The resources and information... about the past were all well connected throughout the project so whenever we were talking about Blackpool’s heritage and the part that dance played in that, it was easy for people to understand and to access further information if they wanted too. Also the music was a powerful tool in connecting people to the past because although it was a modern twist, it was sampled from an old track that was a rich part of Blackpool’s history.”

Project Team Reflection Log

5.2.6. Commitment to high-quality work

“... [we] wanted to keep standards high across the piece. ' It'll do' won't do.”

Project Team Reflection Log

Building on the sense of trust, and willingness to challenge, the project was able to include a high-quality approach to everything produced. This was felt to be important in how the final film was received – and the choice to work with a film maker with experience of making shorts at commercial level was part of this commitment. It was also true at all stages including the choreography and the smaller things like dance tutorials which were initially felt to be a bit ‘homemade’ but were developed over time so that the whole project felt elevated.

5.2.7. “Working bloody hard”

The final essential element in the success was hard work and commitment to keeping going and getting it right.

“It’s been a good vibes project, lots of hard work to achieve the carefree uplift of the movement but rewarding in the sense that most things have worked, especially in difficult times, and the projects just seems to keep giving...”

Project Team Reflection Log

This sense of making it work is threaded through the survey responses, but also in evidence in the Slack conversations where questions are answered at all hours, and the extremely intense delivery days for making the film – which shows in the ‘making of’

film. It was epitomised in the House of Wingz dance team response to technical issues on the day of the film launch

“Seeing House of Wingz save the day when the projector stopped working at the launch in 2021. They came together and did some freestyle dancing and got the crowd cheering and clapping. It was a special moment that wasn't supposed to happen but created a really lovely atmosphere.”

Project Team Reflection Log

5.3. Challenges

5.3.1. “Just a nightmare of a time to do it”

2020-21 was the worst possible time to do a participative project. Levels of participation were hugely affected by lockdown, and weather greatly affected some of the distanced outdoor delivery. The teams themselves were affected by Covid absence and funding and lockdown issues in terms of the rest of their work. This particularly affected the ability to plan and required additional time and flexibility.

“This project, like many other projects during the pandemic has gone through many changes and new life, [which] can be very challenging and frustrating. [F]or a long time we were all not really knowing what could or not happen. So every plan they were developing, had to change considerably, or be adapted, until we all knew what would actually be possible in the end.”

Project Team Reflection Log

“... With an ever-changing landscape it has made the engagement harder to reach when people were in lockdown and then later apprehensive of committing to the workshops.”

Project Team Reflection Log

5.3.2. Capacity

The project was ambitious in design, involving a huge number of delivery partners, as well as multiple engagement points. With lockdown the time period lengthened considerably, and the types of work to be produced also changed, meaning most people were working in new fields (for example, no one had made a dance film before). While this was worked through, with some very positive outcomes for learning, there were serious capacity issues.

“Capacity was a challenge to balance, because of the time frame we were working across and the time we were working in, our workload was up and down and trying to plan in advance to ensure there was enough dedicated time for the project at the right time was really tricky.”

Project Team Reflection Log

Apart from the strain on the team there may have been some impacts on the final piece as a result of lack of capacity.

“There was a large amount of creative input in the scenes that had not been rehearsed. Had time and budget allowed time to do a pre shot walk through might have benefitted the filming schedule. But this wasn't always possible so rehearsal and filming had to be done alongside each other.”

Project Team Reflection Log

Despite these concerns, there is a shared view that the quality of the work to date is great, the capacity issues now lie in the time and space to work on next steps for the project in order to achieve all the potential and hoped for outcomes.

5.3.3. Challenges of multiple leadership and large team

Although overall seen as a strength, the fact that the project involved a huge number of people at a core level was a challenge at times. There are 21 people just on the Slack channel (including the evaluators) and this doesn't include most of the additional choreographers or the film maker. At times it wasn't clear who was taking responsibility for which aspect – although this was usually quickly sorted. In addition, the fact that everyone was working at least a little outside their comfort zone and with new partners meant there was a lot of learning and time to adjust to new ways.

Sometimes there was a feeling that the momentum was held up because of the range of voices – including multiple people who were creative leaders in their own organisations. This was more of a problem in time-critical stages – e.g. around the film making, where in addition to the core team, a new 'creative voice' came into the mix with the film maker, but it did also come to the fore where there was a need for a long-term check or push and it was hard for things to be driven forward with other work considerations to balance:

“The management of the project, whilst being very collaborative and open, has been a challenge in places. As there is no dedicated project manager and with HOW learning to steer the creative process with partners involved, it has on occasion been difficult to know who is accountable for what action. The team meetings have been chaired by

the loudest voice or whoever needs to get their area of work moving”

Project Team Reflection Log

“I think the biggest challenge has been keeping momentum and continuing to produce new material. The Get Dancing project is particularly long and I think it's really important to ensure that we don't allow our output to stagnate, particularly on social media.”

Project Team Reflection Log

5.3.4. Outcomes not yet achieved

Although the engagement targets in terms of participants and audiences were met or exceeded, the project has not yet fully met all its original aims. This is largely due to the adaptations required by lockdown meaning that the final 'output' – the film was a start of dissemination, rather than part of the sharing itself – as would have been the case with the planned engagement / performances like the flash mobs.

In addition, possibly linked to the lack of clarity as to what would be on offer to share, the press coverage wasn't as good as might be hoped, and there is more work to do around using the film and other resources within schools to really enhance the learning around Blackpool's heritage.

All of these can be seen as 'work in progress' if, as we recommend, the project is supported for the next phase of its life.

5.4. Recommendations

Overall, we recommend that partners **work together to ensure that Get Dancing continues and the Blackpool Way dance and film, and all the assets of the project are used to their full potential.**

This is particularly urgent as due to lockdown limitations the impacts so far have mainly reached just to participants and within Blackpool. There is huge potential to use the film, the dance and the partnership to shift perceptions and raise awareness of Blackpool's heritage – and to promote awareness of Showtown, as well as offering fun and engagement to a range of people across the town and beyond.

They should **seek to include participants, as well as all partners, in the next stage of the project to bring in their ideas and learning.**

Truly building on the wider partnership will offer opportunities for new ideas, and also potential funding streams beyond those available to core partners. Resourcing some development time to

secure funding for the next phase could be a great investment in achieving the project aims and core aims for partners.

Partners should reflect on the learning around the project, in particular:

- o The **value of a brand** in bringing disparate elements of a complex project together
- o **Knowing what a good partner looks and feels like**

It is clear from the feedback that the partners on the project are good to work with, there is also a lot of learning about what this entails – respect, adaptability, willingness to challenge and listen to challenge, complementary skills and networks and shared attitudes to ensuring quality and hard work.

This is invaluable learning in developing new partnerships and deciding who to bring into future work on this project and beyond.

6. Appendix: Data Gathering and Story of Change

6.1. Data gathering tools

82 post-film audience survey responses

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/GetDancingpostfilm>

17 participant survey responses

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/GetDancingquestionnaire>

Team reflection logs with 22 responses from 10 individual team members

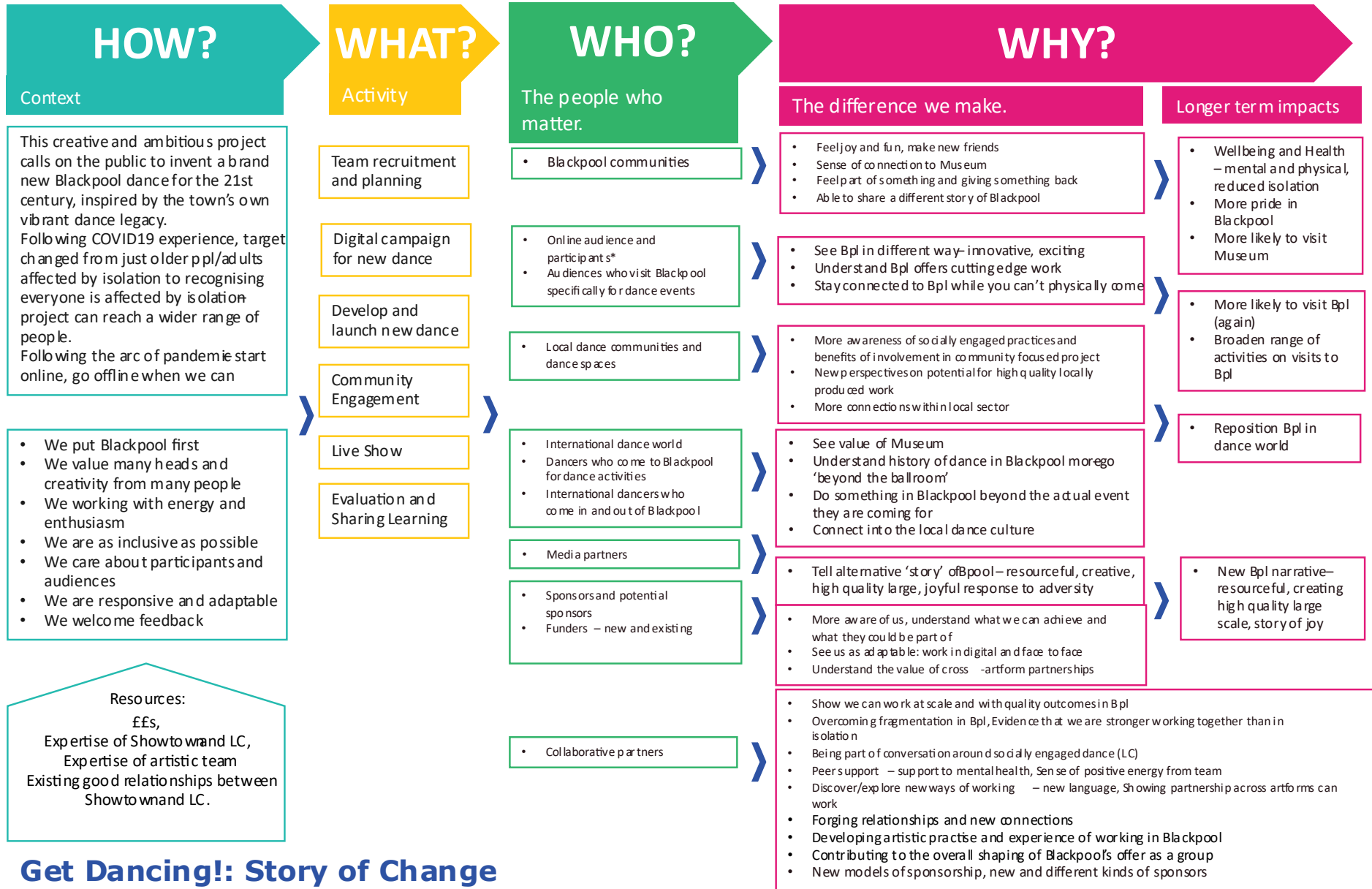
<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/getdancing>

12 Project Team Survey responses

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/GetDancingTeam>

6.2. Story of Change

This is shown on the following page.



Get Dancing!: Story of Change
October 2020

Project Credits

Get Dancing was a collaboration between LeftCoast, House of Wingz and Showtown.



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