



NEURO-MOVES 2024-26 - EVALUATION REPORT

Introduction

This report covers activity delivered by LPM Dance in Preston and Rossendale between 2024 and 2026¹, primarily working with people living with Parkinson's Disease (Parkinson's), but including people with other neurological conditions, their families, friends and carers. In Preston this work is the continuation of Preston Neuro-Moves: Connect & Flow, a class that in one form or another has been delivered since 2018. At the other end of the scale is Rossendale, where LPM has worked to establish Neuro-Moves Rossendale as a centre in East Lancashire. This nascent group has experienced a range of challenges (outlined below) and is a smaller, but committed group.

In addition there have been regular online sessions, facilitating connection, activity and fellowship for those who are unable to attend 'in person' classes.

The project has also engaged University of Lancashire Dance students, who have attended sessions ostensibly to support participants and to provide practical experience to students and graduates, but who have found their own general well-being improved. This may be attributable to the arguably unique ambience created in these sessions, which reach out to everyone who accesses the space.

Context

Projects that involve people living with Parkinson's need to take into account a range of underlying issues that have an impact on outputs. Attendance at individual sessions cannot be judged as an accurate measure of progress, however presented. This is due to several particulars:

- All of the participants living with Parkinson's will be on a range of medication, which can have a profound effect on moods and on physical capabilities, which cannot be easily predicted.
- With regard to people living with Parkinson's, physical and mental well-being can be seen to be even more intricately linked than with non-sufferers. Whilst people not living with Parkinson's may be able to attend a session even if they are feeling a bit low, for a person with Parkinson's it may have a seriously deleterious effect on their physical capability.
- An individual's ability to attend classes is often dependent on other people, who provide not only lifts to the venue but often stay on to offer assistance. It may well also depend on an individual's current state of the illness
- Given the fluid nature of attendance, group dynamics can shift. With a larger group, there is more momentum, flow and sense of continuity because it is likely a core of familiar faces are present.

¹ Delivery in Preston and online commenced in November 2023

The value of a project such as this necessarily places greater value on qualitative rather than quantitative measures. There is no known cure for Parkinson's and only a single outcome; as such the usual metrics of 'increase' cannot be reasonably applied.

Project Groups

Neuro-Moves Rossendale.

This group has been initiated as a part of this project, with the intention of setting up a dance hub in East Lancashire. In the first instance a partnership was established with Horse & Bamboo Theatre Company to use their space in Rawtenstall. It is an accessible community space with a cafeteria and some parking nearby. It was believed to be a space that would be familiar to participants and their carers and that was available during the day, as most of the Horse & Bamboo activity took place in the evening. However, although a small core group was created, it proved to be more difficult to access and because the sessions took place during the day, the space had little atmosphere as the building was empty (except for occasional office staff on the floor above), very cold and dark. It transpired that none of the participants had been to the venue, which meant that not only were we introducing people to a 'new venue', but that it was likely to be unknown to the target audience, thus presenting a barrier to other potential attendees.

The sessions found a new home at the Haslingden Community Link. This centre has a more active daytime offer for a variety of community groups, providing a more vibrant and welcoming environment. This had an extremely positive impact on participants, who found the space more accessible and which was a more familiar environment for many.

Preston Neuro-Moves: Connect & Flow

This group was initially created in 2018 and as a result there is a well-established and thriving group with attendees covering a diverse range of abilities and at different stages of the disease. It is the longest-running class and has become the main weekly focus for many of the participants. In its current formation it has the advantage of being based at the Media Factory, University of Lancashire, in the centre of Preston. The group met in a dance studio and had the advantage of weekly contact with University of Lancashire dance students. It is a tight-knit group that has the obvious benefits and advantages of having developed over several years with a real sense of community and ownership amongst the participants.

Neuro-Moves online

These sessions were delivered weekly via a Zoom link, which enabled people to attend a class without the additional stress of travelling to a venue.

Session Activities

All sessions followed the same basic pattern, developed over several years and informed by training and research to maximise benefits to this community. Each session was flexible and open to change depending on the physical capabilities and the mood of the particular session participants.

The 'in person' sessions at Preston and Rossendale began with games to warm up the muscles and to focus the mind. This usually consisted of participants throwing soft balls to each other in a random pattern and would start with one ball and if the group was able to manage, progressed to as many as four balls being thrown at the same time. This encouraged eye-hand coordination in a playful way that focussed on the game rather than on the action.

Once the group was fully engaged, there would be a series of exercises, again presented creatively, that aimed to stimulate nerves in various parts of the body. These could be undertaken seated or standing,

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depending on the preference of the individual which resulted in a fully-inclusive class for anyone living with Parkinson's, no matter how advanced their condition might be.

This was the same when more advanced creative dance/play exercises were introduced. These always engaged the imagination and encouraged participants to create stories, either individually or in pairs or groups.

After the movement session ended there was an opportunity for the group to chat, discuss the work and talk to the evaluator (who attended and participated in several of the sessions). Tea and biscuits encouraged a relaxed atmosphere which encouraged discussion and sharing of stories.

Evaluation Data

Quantitative data were collected by the people who were directly involved in delivering the activity, the session leaders, as well as via online/digital methods. The collection methods included:

- attendance information
- paper questionnaires with scale questions and online surveys.
- This information is presented as total outputs for the project as the specific medical circumstances surrounding the project do not lend themselves to a simple mathematical representation to demonstrate increase in attendance. Participants drop in and out of the project, or join part-way through depending on circumstances beyond their control.

Qualitative data were collected by means of interviews with individuals, questionnaires and post-session discussions, which provided a continual feedback loop throughout the project. These concentrated on the more subjective responses of participants with regard to how they felt about themselves, the group and how the classes contributed to their lives.

Session leaders have also contributed their own observations and responses, which objectively differ from the subjective feelings of participants.

Additional data from the Empowering Voices project; a longitudinal study in partnership with the University of Lancashire, has contributed exponentially to this report. The University of Lancashire team comprised academics in the fields of Social Science, Biomechanics, LBMA, Dance and Dance Movement Psychotherapy. Their data provided additional deeply-personal, in-depth responses from participants, demonstrating more clearly the impact and value of this work. Their methodology was based on the view that the Empowering Voices project was a co-research activity, with participants having a central role in the research questions as well as the outcomes, which was highly compatible with the Neuro-Moves philosophy and methods.

Outputs

Preston

66 people have engaged with Neuro-Moves weekly sessions since November 2023. As most of those early attendees continued their activity during timeframe of this evaluation they are included in this report. This number is made up from:

- 46 were people living with neurological conditions and their family members.
- 13 visitors (Researchers/Health professionals)
- 7 students

3 artists were engaged to lead sessions.

99 sessions have been delivered

A new research partnership has been established with the University of Lancashire:

Lynn Froggett (Social Science), Graham Chapman (Biomechanics), Professor James Richards (Biomechanics), Ambreen Chohan (Biomechanics), Lucy Nicholson (LBMA), Ruth Spencer (Dance), Dr Richard Coaten (Dance Movement Psychotherapy).

Additional funding was secured from the University of Lancashire to run Empowering Voices, involving our community and the team mentioned above.

Rossendale

A total of 44 people have been engaged in 61 weekly classes from March 2024 to December 2025

- 31 people were people living with neurological conditions and their family members
- 10 were visitors (Researchers/Health professionals)
- 3 were students

6 artists were engaged in delivering/co-delivering the programme

A range of different performance genres were integrated into the sessions, including drumming workshops (co-led by community drumming practitioner Filomena Ianni), ballet (co-led by Aimee Williamson) and Bharatanatyam dance workshops (in partnership with Swati Dance), for group members. In addition, the group welcomed soprano singer Bibi Heal to share a workshop based on Songs That Move, an interdisciplinary music and dance project for people living with Parkinson's that is developing in collaboration with **Neuro Heroes** specialist physiotherapists, podcasters **Movers & Shakers**, and **Parkinson's UK**. 5 additional sessions were delivered; 2 with Swati Dance, 1 drumming, 1 ballet and 1 opera session with soprano Bib Heal, a London-based opera singer working with a dance, music and Parkinson's project.

Neuro-Moves online

86 online Neuro-Moves classes have been delivered.

18 people living with Parkinson's and friends/family have participated.

The numbers have been building up steadily with a regular core of 13 each week.

6 Guests (professional dance artists, students, health professionals and the evaluator) have been welcomed.

Online Pilates

86 online Pilates sessions have been delivered.

10 people have registered for Pilates, which includes 3 people living with Parkinson's and 1 with a neurological disease.

The project has engaged with a broader range of people living with other neurological conditions (people with MS, Aphasia, Parkinson's, dementia, long covid/MW, neuropathy) compared to other areas. The practice has adapted to accommodate the diverse needs within the groups.

Related Outputs

Whilst the scope of this evaluation report covers sessions at Preston, Rossendale and 2 online, the following activities are also part of the National Lottery Reaching Communities funding that has supported the Neuro-Moves Project. As such they have been included here to demonstrate the breadth of work that has been achieved throughout the life-time of the project.

LPM delivered a range of taster/outreach sessions across the region as follows:

- 2 sessions at the Blue Flamingo Cafe Preston
- An older people's event at Preston County Hall
- Delivered a presentation at the Parkinson's UK Conference
- Delivered an online session as a part of World Parkinson's Day
- 3 outreach sessions at the Rossendale Hospice Wellbeing Day Service
- A session at the Beacon Dementia Wellbeing Event
- 6 sessions for the Parkinson's UK Cafe support groups at Clitheroe, Preston (2), Rawtenstall (2) and Nelson
- One session for the Haslingden Dementia Group
- One Speak Easy session for This is The Charity in Ramsbottom, which supports people with Aphasia. The Ramsbottom support group engages people from Bury, Greater Manchester and Rossendale
- 3 open sessions at events in Preston aimed at people who were newly- diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease,
- An Early Diagnosis event at DeeParkinson'sale in Preston
- One session with Manchester Camerata in Gorton
- A one-off session at each of the Bury Support Group, Whalley Taster group and Greenmount village.
- An introduction to Neuro-Moves and dance for health session at Burnley College with 16-21 year old dance/performing arts students
- LPM co-programmed the Empowering Voices symposium event in November 2025 in partnership with the University of Lancashire
- Led sessions for the Haslingden Community Link Wellbeing fair.
- Delivered an 'Introduction to Neuro-Moves' online workshop/cafe for people interested in the programme. This event engaged 11 people, both professionals and people living with neurological conditions.

LPM worked to develop networks and partnerships across Lancashire. This has included joining the Rossendale Connect network, regularly attending meetings. LPM has also established relationships with Health and Wellbeing coaches in Rossendale and with Carers Link. This work was facilitated in great part by the Community Activator team, consisting of 3 participants living with Parkinson's; Tessa Whiteside, Julia Mansfield and Craig Millar, who had attended online meetings to support the development and progression of Neuro-Moves. This ensured the voices of our communities were influential in driving the project and resulted in the Neuro-Moves introductory cafe and meeting with partners in Rossendale. In addition to the Community Activator team the wider community made a significant contribution. Their voices are important and valuable; recommendations included

- meeting with other partners and specialists
- members of the group sharing facebook/instagram posts
- members of the group sharing ideas for music they would like to use.

There were several training events that took place, including:

- 3 Safeguarding training courses for George Adams, who is the Designated Safeguarding Officer for LPM
- Group safeguarding training with Cheshire Dance Level 2
- Council for Voluntary Services safeguarding training level 3
- CPD training for practitioners which consisted of vocal training with Loz Kaye (County of Song)².

² Parkinson's often causes a reduction in the amplitude of movement (bradykinesia) and muscle rigidity, resulting in a voice that is soft, monotonous, breathy, or hoarse—a condition known as hypokinetic dysarthria.

- A full team training day in Preston, providing an opportunity for reflection and development

Outcomes

A focus on the activity i.e warm-up games, creative tasks and use of imagination enabled participants to move with greater ease and facility. This is because the brain is tricked by focussing on something that is enjoyable rather than focussing on the exercise and so the participant is able to undertake physical movements that might ordinarily be difficult or impossible³. By focussing on the imagination and creative tasks enabled participants to move with greater confidence, which in turn improved their mood and an increased willingness to explore and experiment with a range of movements.

A sense of community proved to be crucial in developing increased confidence. As friendships formed, participants became more playful and creative in exploring their movement potential. Playfulness was contagious and encouraged increased participation by those who had initially been more reticent. The process was iterative; the more people engaged in the creative process, the more enjoyment and confidence that resulted, which encouraged more engagement in a virtuous positive upward curve. There was a noticeable increase in confidence at the end of sessions with participants staying longer to participate in conversation over refreshments.

A common theme to surface was the importance of connection with others as well as within the individual. This could be seen in eye contact and physical contact, bridging the gap between individuals and breaking down any sense of isolation. The online sessions were particularly useful for those who were clinically vulnerable. The support offered by the session leader and other participants resulted in the class becoming an important part of a weekly schedule. For remote participants, a sense of fellowship was important to feeling strong in body, mind and spirit.

Each week there was a boost in enjoyment and fulfilment levels through the session. Mobility increased and there were improvements to walking, standing, balancing, co-ordination, extension and transitional movements⁴. These benefits crossed over into life at home with one participant saying that they translated multiple actions from the sessions to daily tasks: "When I get a plate from the kitchen I use the side- stepping action to move the plate. Telling myself step to the left, then the middle, then the right." The various creative exercises undertaken in class were beneficial in day-to-day life. Participants learned new ways to approach movement by working around challenges rather than fighting them.

It was important for participants to work together as a group with other people living with Parkinson's. A safe space to explore movement potential within a group provided emotional and literal security, without any sense of external judgement on how the quality of a movement might be seen objectively. It didn't matter if movement was jerky, smooth, rhythmical or otherwise; it was the fact of being creatively and imaginatively active that was important and beneficial.

A commonly-stated view was that there wasn't the same level of enjoyment in 'pure' fitness classes that focussed on functional exercises. The creative tasks were fun precisely because they did not focus on symptoms and were not boring and repetitive. The focus was on what was achievable, rather than on the body's limitations. Participants also described how the dance sessions "helps the brain unlock" and moves it

³ Further information regarding the mechanics of how music, rhythm and audio-visual external cueing enable the neuro- signals to bypass the damaged areas of the brain: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10331838/>

⁴ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28381488/>

away from the 'can't do' mode. Dance facilitated more freedom to express themselves; for some a unique and novel experience. Common experiences included a sense of personal power, an opportunity to express feelings and a space for growth⁵.

Participants expressed a reduction in their sense of isolation: "I feel interconnected rather than isolated as I have been for so long". The class became a positive focus for the week, being viewed as a friendly and supportive session where open discussion was more possible. Meeting people with the same condition reduced the isolation and encouraged new friendships. At the same time it was important for participants to feel a part of something that was of use to a wider community and was a positive thing coming from the negative life experience of having Parkinson's: "This is something that I have taken with me into my life and has enabled me to feel I have lots to offer in other areas of my life and PD doesn't need to hold me back". Others stated that attending the Neuro-Moves class was the most joyous afternoon of the week. "... the music, the dancing, the communication with all the others in the class, together with the creative imagery inspired by our leader is both great physically, socially and mentally. I know that if the class had to fold, everyone in the class would be devastated".

Observations / Comments

The project evaluator was warmly welcomed by the participants as if being welcomed into a family gathering; a feeling that can only come from a group of people who are comfortable in the space and the activity and who feel that it is 'their space'.

The 'reflective practice' methodology employed by the Empowering Voices team was more effective as an evaluation tool than the more traditional interrogations. By engaging the session participants in the process in a creative, collaborative and ongoing way enabled the project to obtain a more accurate record of how sessions were affecting participants.

The community that has developed, particularly in Preston, is extremely supportive, powerful and familial. One of the previous attendees sadly passed away but she had kept attending the Wednesday class even when she gave up other activities. Some months later her carer brought gifts for participants and session leaders as a 'thank you'. This evaluator has never witnessed anything like this before.

The sessions have demonstrated a need for more accessible, inclusive provision for people living both with and without neurological conditions. The sessions have attracted several older people with arthritis and younger, neurodiverse people. They have been a welcome addition to the classes although the main target remains people living with neurological conditions.

The holistic nature of the Neuro-Moves sessions was responsible for the psychological and physical improvements witnessed over a period of time. Many participants noted that traditional medical practitioners were reluctant to engage with the "holistic-ness of my Parkinson's" and were more comfortable in providing mechanical feedback on hands or feet. Being treated as a whole person is demonstrably both novel to many of the participants and essential to their improvement.

Conclusion

In a post-project survey, 100% of survey respondents said they would recommend Neuro-Moves for anyone with a neurological condition. 100% said it helped with their mood and 90-95% said that it helped with improved motivation, fitness and connection with others. 75% said that it helped them make new

⁵ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4756105/>

friendships. 76.5% cited improved balance; 83% improved movement confidence; 52% improved motor control; 70.5% less muscle stiffness; in a list of Parkinson's symptoms survey respondents reported improvement in all areas.

In addition, respondents were very clear that the use of music, imagery and imagination was a major factor in facilitating these improvements: "The music definitely helps me to move better. This is partly to do with rhythm and patterns, and also to do with the mood that music can create, and the story that music can generate". Respondents stated that the music helped to free up the brain, providing an alternative focus for their efforts and facilitating different types of movement ranging from slow and controlled to fast and explosive. Music also helped with connections on an emotional level, enabling participants to immerse themselves in the creative activity.

In a similar fashion, the use of imagery enables participants to create an alternative story for themselves which opens

Neuro-Moves sessions are unique in the way that creativity, music, imagination and movement are brought together by specialist artists, who have specific training in the types of movement that encourage improvements in participants with Parkinson's and other neurological conditions. 'Ordinary' fitness or exercise sessions tend to focus the mind on specific actions, which have the negative effect of highlighting what is not possible. The Neuro-Moves sessions switch the focus onto the possible through the use of imagination, music and creative movement, designed to demonstrate what is possible. Participants are able, in a limited way, to forget that they are living with a neurological problem and to feel "normal".

The last word should belong to a regular Neuro-Moves attendee:

"Neuro moves classes use a lot of imagery to help us to move. It helps to imagine a movement or a story. Movement feels more purposeful and I can achieve things that I wouldn't achieve outside of the class. Where else, for example, would I be marching with high knees as if I was a Star Wars Imperial guard! Or twirling an imaginary umbrella like Singing in the Rain. The imagery helps me to move in ways that are completely different from every day movements. Neuro-Moves reaches parts of me that no other class reaches. These are movements that are wider, and taller, and louder, or smaller and softer and quieter than everyday movements, but they are essential for me to maintaining my overall mobility whilst living with Parkinson's. This is not just about making sure that I can stand up from a chair, or reach a mug from a top cupboard. It is about maintaining my quality of life. The classes also often make me laugh! Which is an added bonus!"

APPENDIX I

Additional Outputs

The Neuro-Moves work has unlocked additional funding to support activity and has been included as an appendix to demonstrate the overall results of the Reaching Communities funding. The data support the oft-stated contention that funding for one project has a wider impact on other related activity in the area and the field of activity in question.

In addition to the two online classes, LPM also delivered 86 Inclusive Yoga classes, which were attended by 8 disabled/neurodivergent individuals, 3 medical students from Sheffield University and 1 from Glasgow University.

LPM's work attracted the attention of Bib Heal, an opera singer working on Songs that Move, a London based dance, music and Parkinson's project. Bib came to Rossendale to share practice and, as a direct result, LPM was invited to work with the project as part of Ryedale Music Festival.

LPM secured an additional funding to expand the project in other areas of Lancashire. A grant of £900 supported outreach session delivery and the legacy of Neuro-Moves in Rossendale. Neuro-Moves Grindleton was established with additional funding from Sport England and National Lottery. Neuro-Moves Cleveleys was established with funding from Parkinson's UK, Wyre Council, and Sport England. Additional funding was secured via EntuziArt and the Romanian Government/Arts Council to deliver the international exchange (see below).

Connection Events

LPM has made connections with other practitioners across Europe working in the field of dance/movement and Parkinson's Disease. They developed a partnership with EntuziArt in Romania and as direct result they programmed a regional exchange event between Neuro-Moves Lancashire participants and their counterparts from Romania. The exchange included workshop leaders and participants from the Preston Neuro-Moves group, an additional group set up in Grindleton, Lancashire and visitors from Romania. They included dancers, practitioners and therapists from EntuziArt.

Community Connection Events

Additional Public Engagement funding was secured from the University of Lancashire to support the symposium, as well as the delivery of several engagement events forming part of the UK leg of the international exchange programme. This activity involved participants from across the Neuro-Moves Lancashire programme.

APPENDIX II

Project Legacy from Neuro-Moves Preston

As a direct result of the Neuro-Moves Project and LPM's work in the field more widely, there have been several exciting outcomes

- An academic article "Outlining the Pedagogical Practice" is currently being written by Ruth Spencer and Dr Richard Coaton, which is one of their outcomes of the Empowering Voices project
- There will be a write up from the panel discussion from the November 2025 Symposium which will be widely disseminated
- LPM has been asked to contribute to a proposed follow-up symposium event in March 2026 with the University, with a proposed focus on carers. Also, StJohn Crean, Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Enterprise, is considering developing the Dementia Research Group to change and embrace neuro-degenerative conditions more widely, which is a positive move for the Dance for Parkinsons work.
- Lucy Nicholson and Graham Chapman are undertaking initial explorations into how the Laban Bartenieff Movement System⁶ and people working in biomechanics might speak to one another.
- Discussions regarding the capture and dissemination of the learning from the exchange visits with Entuziart (Bucharest)
- Ceci Fontenessi, a researcher and practitioner working with Entuziart, is working to adopt the Empowering Voices approach in their future projects
- Lucy Nicholson and Ruth Spencer are giving a talk to the Occupational Health Students at the University of Lancashire in March 2026. It is hoped that some students will engage in this work and will assist with raising the profile of this type of work within the health and social care courses at the University

An additional outcome from the project is that LPM have been engaged by People Dancing, the national community dance organisation, as their recognised training providers for the North West in a new, nationwide initiative to support artist development.

APPENDIX III

Impact on Artists

⁶ <https://wholovement.org/what-is-the-laban-bartenieff-movement-system-lbms/>

The workshop leaders and artists who were involved in the project were asked to give feedback on how they had been impacted by involvement with the project. Their responses fall into 6 broad areas:

1. Learning and development through collaboration and participation. All respondents were clear that they had learned from the participants with regard to the diverse experiences of living with neurological conditions. Less experienced artists were positive about working with those with more experience, furthering their practical knowledge and confidence. The experienced artists learned from the groups, each other and guest artists. "My practice changes and develops over time. I like this aspect of the work; I like the challenge of being creative and forward-thinking". Working with Bharatanatyam dancers was especially valuable in terms of facial expression and mudras (symbolic hand gestures), which are of particular assistance with Parkinson's symptoms.
2. Increased confidence for less-experienced practitioners, who said they had gained more self-confidence in supporting people with neurological conditions and their support networks. That increased confidence led to increased contribution to discussions regarding research. This provides training and knowledge increase as a secondary outcome of the project.
3. There was a strong sense of community and belonging with all groups, with one artist stating that "I feel part of the Parkinson's community. I feel valued. I have made new friends". The corollary, of course, is that the practitioners can become personally concerned about the health and challenges faced by participants, finding the almost inevitable health decline emotionally challenging.
4. Variety. Each group had a unique identity, strongly rooted in its community. For instance, the Haslingden group were very open to improvisation and play and were keen and committed to supporting the continuation of classes. They shared social media posts, advocated locally and shared flyers.
5. Joy. A potentially unexpected outcome is the sense of joy that was manifest in all reports. Sessions were joyful with everyone coming with the intention of having a good time. There was reciprocity in the joy with artists saying that they often laughed a great deal and felt uplifted by interactions with participants.
6. All artists expressed a deep sense of personal fulfilment. One stated that they were "moving away from the classic dance for Parkinson's model and feeling more freedom in doing my own version of what I think the group needs and is responding to".