

Grants for the Arts Case Study

AESOP: Dance to Health



Image courtesy of AESOP. Photo credit: Helen Murray

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AESOP is blending dance and physiotherapy to pilot the world's first evidence-based older people's fall prevention programme taught through high quality dance.

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Case Study Introduction

What will I learn and is it relevant to me?

Themes...

- Older People
- Arts and Health
- Social Impact

Learning...

- Recruiting participants for older people projects
- Designing projects to address health and social issues
- Engaging older people in dance

Applications/relevance...

This case study is relevant to:

- Arts marketers and engagement teams looking to recruit participants for older people projects
- Directors and Chief Executives interested in responding to health and social issues
- Anyone working in the field of Arts and Health
- Grants for the Arts applicants who want to find out more about funded projects

AESOP addresses challenges and unmet needs in society with suitable, evidence-based, cost-effective and sustainable high quality artistic activities.

Background

Painting the backdrop to the project

About AESOP..

AESOP is an arts charity and social enterprise, originally founded in 2009 and set up as a stand alone charity in 2014.

The name is inspired by Aesop's fables, which are not just great stories but also sources of wisdom and practical advice. It reflects the importance of storytelling and narrative in the arts. AESOP also stands for 'arts enterprise with a social purpose'.

AESOP believes the UK is blessed with world-class arts that sit on the periphery of other sectors working to achieve positive social change. It addresses challenges and unmet needs in society with suitable, evidence-based, cost-effective and sustainable high quality artistic activities.

It defines arts inclusively to embrace popular, folk, classical and contemporary forms across combined arts, crafts, dance, digital arts, design, environmental arts, film, games and interactive media, literature, music, photography, puppetry, theatre and visual arts.

Our audiences

AESOP's audiences are identified through social need rather than organisational priorities. It identifies pressing issues around health, wellbeing and isolation and develops projects and audiences accordingly.

Our long-term ambitions...

- To address health and social care challenges through the arts
- To develop structures and methods to help other arts organisation work with health organisations to address health and wellbeing needs
- To create an ethical market for arts interventions in non-arts sectors

We wanted to develop the two evidence-based fall prevention exercise programmes, Otago and FaME, into something that people would enjoy.

Planning

Exploring plans and motivations

What we planned to do

We planned to address the issue of older people's falls through high quality dance.

We wanted to develop the two evidence-based fall prevention exercise programmes, Otago and FaME, into something that people would enjoy. The current programmes used by physiotherapists are plagued by low take-up and infrequent attendance. By using dance, we intended to develop something fun and creative that people would look forward to attending regularly.

We planned to pilot Otago and FaME dance sessions in London, Cheshire and Oxfordshire. The target audiences for these would mirror those of the original programmes.

The Otago sessions would be aimed at frailer older people aged 75 or over who had experienced multiple falls. The FaME sessions would be aimed at people aged 60 and over who had either experienced a fall or were at risk. Both age groups would be flexible depending on health and need.

How we planned to do it

We planned to train dance artists from our partner organisations Cheshire Dance, East London Dance and South East Dance in Otago and FaME. These artists would then take the exercises and build them into dance sessions, drawing on their own personal disciplines.

We would then identify older people partner organisations who already work with our target audience to recruit participants.

Why we planned to do it

- Falls are traumatic for older people and cost the NHS £2.3 billion per year
- Current falls prevention exercise programmes suffer from low take-up, patchy provision and lack of maintenance classes, which result in wasted investment
- To develop new audiences/participants for dance by engaging older people who'd not previously watched or participated in dance
- To engage older people who used to dance or enjoy watching dance but had lapsed due to ill health or isolation
- To ultimately give arts organisations a means of engaging with health organisations by evidencing health savings and health and wellbeing outcomes

We identified ‘Older People Partner Organisations’ who were already working with our target audience and were able to provide space, expertise and support.

Action

Delving into the process

How we began the project

We began the project in February 2015 with a lab facilitated by choreographer Luke Pell for twelve dance artists from Cheshire Dance, South East Dance and East London Dance. It was designed to build mutual understanding between the worlds of dance and older people’s exercise.

Later Life Training then ran four days of training for the dance artists in the FaME and Otago physiotherapy exercise programmes. Later Life Training base all their training on research evidence. They have worked, or continue to work, with the Department of Health, NHS, Age UK and the World Health Organisation.

Following this training, the dance artists went away and built the exercises into dance sessions. The artists all specialised in different forms of dance from ballet to contemporary so the programmes evolved differently in each area.

We recruited ‘Peer Motivators’ at this stage to help test the movements the dancers were working on. These were people of a similar age to our target audience, often from existing dance classes, who would later support and encourage participants in the pilot sessions.

How we recruited participants

We had always planned to reach participants through organisations that were already working with our target age groups.

During the programme development phase we did a lot of research and consultation with local communities. Out of this we identified ‘Older People Partner Organisations’ who were already working with our target audience and were able to provide space for the sessions to take place. These included AmicusHorizon Housing Association and Jewish Care in London.

It was really important to choose venues that had staff on site who were used to supporting older people. We also prioritised spaces that would minimise travel so

organisations with a suitable hall and older people in residence were ideal.

The partnership approach was supported by Dance to Health flyers that positioned the activity as dance classes with health and wellbeing benefits. It also highlighted the social benefit of meeting new people to appeal to those suffering from isolation.

The printed materials also gave practical advice about things you needed to be physically able to do in order to attend. For the FaME classes this meant being able to walk without assistance in and outdoors. For the Otago sessions anyone who could walk with assistance could attend.

The pilot programmes

Two pilot programmes in London began in July 2015, two Cheshire pilots were launched in October 2015 and the final two pilots supported by Grants for the Arts launched in Oxfordshire in November 2015.

The pilots are evolving as they go with dance artists incorporating participants’ favourite music and dance styles. This is leading to deeper engagement and a real sense of enjoyment among the participants.

Evaluation of the pilots taken together will achieve statistical significance and qualitative as well as quantitative feedback.

The cost

Each pilot costs £48,000 to deliver. This includes training and setup costs, direct delivery costs to the dance organisations, and marketing activity. Another major cost is commissioning three stages of evaluation to ensure there is sufficient evidence from the pilot phase to take the project further.

Arts Council England invested £87,000 for the pilot phase. We’ve managed to raise a further £320,000 from a combination of trusts and foundations and two of our ‘Older People Partner Organisations’.

‘If you’d have told me yesterday that I was going to do an hour’s exercise, I would never have believed you.’

The results so far

Changing the world one piece at a time

How the organisation has benefited

Although the project is still in its early stages, AESOP has already benefited hugely. Dance to Health is the first ‘aesop’ (arts enterprise with a social purpose) we’ve delivered directly to participants.

It is helping us achieve our aim to use arts to address health and social care challenges. It is also enabling us to develop structures and methods to support arts organisations in tackling health and wellbeing issues.

Without this early investment from Arts Council England and all of the trusts and foundations it would have been impossible to attract the health funding we hope to achieve in the longer term. This project is allowing us to gather the evidence we need to tackle this issue on a larger scale.

How people have benefited

As the first of the pilot projects has only recently begun, the full impact is not yet apparent. Initial benefits include:

- 42 participants already crediting the classes with increasing their confidence and improving their health and wellbeing
- 12 dance artists and 8 assistant dance artists trained in Otago and FaME, expanding their skills and teaching capabilities
- 12 ‘Peer Motivators’ volunteering to support other older people, resulting in a sense of worth and additional opportunities to socialise

Feedback from participants

‘I’m getting more confident’

‘My legs feel like they are getting stronger’

‘I nearly fell in the bathroom, but managed not to fall!’

‘I’ve got my mojo back!’

‘If you’d have told me yesterday that I was going to do an hour’s exercise, I would never have believed you.’

‘It made me feel free.’

‘I felt as though I am capable of doing more than I thought.’

Turn the arts process on its head and look at the problems that exist in society and create artistic activity to address them.

Top tips

Sharing learning with others

Successes

The 'Peer Motivators' have been incredibly successful so far. Seeing people of a similar age demonstrating movements and supporting others has given participants the confidence to try exercises they never thought they'd be able to do.

Working with 'Older People Partner Organisations' has enabled us to tap into existing networks of older people who would benefit from the programme.

Challenges

There were some early challenges in recruitment because we weren't able to spread marketing materials far enough in the time available.

The other initial challenge was encouraging participants to commit to two sessions a week, which Otago and FaME evidence indicates is the required amount to prevent falls.

Recommendations

- Turn the arts process on its head and look at the problems that exist in society and create artistic activity to address them
- Give yourself sufficient time for research - finding the right partners and evidence on which to base your project is essential and takes time

The fact that participants are looking forward to the next session means that we are already overcoming the attendance issues experienced by the original programmes.

The final word

Anticipating the conclusion

How we will measure success

We are really pleased with how the project is going so far. Early feedback has been incredibly positive and the fact that participants are already looking forward to the next session means that we are already overcoming the frequency issues experienced by the original programmes.

The project still has a long way to go. Each of the pilots will run for six months and will be thoroughly evaluated.

Research into the Otago and FaME programmes already evidences a 55% reduction in the risk of falling if people attend two classes a week. Because we are incorporating these exercises the programme will deliver the same reduction if we achieve the required level of attendance.

Success for the project will therefore be measured through:

- Participants attending 2 sessions per week
- Reduction in GP visits
- Improvements in wellbeing and mental health
- Increased dance interest and ability
- A reported sense of group identity
- Reduced isolation
- Health status measurement that can be used in clinical and economic evaluation

Future plans

We have a large conference planned for 5 February 2016, which will act as a showcase for Dance to Health. We aim to have 300 health commissioners present and to use this opportunity to attract support for the next phase of the project.

The pilot will be followed by a maintenance programme to ensure that the older people involved continue to benefit. Initially this will require funding but the intention is for the maintenance programme to be self-sustaining through membership fees and local support.