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# Definitions, core values and a code of conduct for community dance

In the last issue of *Animated* **Ken Bartlett** and **Chris Stenton** set out the Foundation for Community Dance's detailed plan for the implementation of the Professional Framework, *Making a Move*. In this issue they set out the results of extensive consultation about current definitions of community dance, the core values of the work and a code of professional conduct

**Community dance professionals** operate in a world governed by complex legislative frameworks and government directives where accountability and transparency of working practices is an expectation, and increasingly a requirement. At the Foundation for Community Dance we believe that people are offering their services and expertise in a professional capacity, they should be expected - and aspire - to be clear and open about what they do, and responsible and accountable in how they do it.

The majority of professions that work with non-professionals in their field e.g. medical and social care professionals, teachers and so on, have established and articulated the values that underpin their work, an ethical stance on how they operate, and codes of conduct to describe their responsibilities to their profession, employers and customers or clients.

From our research, it seems these things fulfil a number of key functions:

- To establish and communicate the shared values and ethical principles that give a profession its identity; give the work a clear context; and guide the professional practice
- To ensure that both professionals and their client groups are safeguarded and are able to work together in an empowered, informed and mutually beneficial way
- To enable professionals to assure employers that they know what they are doing and can take responsibility for themselves and their work with others.

We think the community dance profession sufficiently well established to be explicit and unapologetic about what it stands for (core values), its intentions towards other people (an ethical stance) and how individuals go about assuring employers, colleagues, peers and participants of their capacity to act appropriately in their work with them (professional conduct). Whilst the core beliefs and professional principles of community dance may be implicitly understood, and are evident in the work of many community dance artists, there is a need to clarify and communicate these ideas as an explicit commitment to quality practice across the profession as a whole.

We distributed a fairly detailed document to our development partners for *Making a Move*, and asked for

their feedback and observations. Broadly speaking the response was very positive and encouraging - with a reassuring level of consensus from all. It is interesting, though not surprising, that the majority of comments relate to clarity of language, highlighting the importance of moving towards a shared understanding of concepts and definitions - so that when we are talking about the same thing, we really are talking about the same thing.

There was a clear recognition that these statements provide a clear 'marker in the sand' about commitment to quality in individual practice. This is a cultural shift for the profession and may at times seem to be stating the obvious. However we believe that this is the kind of language that employers will understand and recognise, thus giving employers greater confidence in our work and us greater flexibility to be more creative and flexible

All of this presents a significant challenge to the community dance profession: in providing a clear professional identity, it now requires people to sign up, to pin their colours to the mast, and use it to enhance professional practice and profile. A major challenge for FCD is about working with artists and employers to ensure that the Values and Code of Conduct are genuinely implemented into individual and organisational practice. We are exploring several options around this, including a link to FCD membership packages. We will be organising a number of FCD Members Networking Events in 2009 to look at how we can embed this work with the profession. As previously reported we remain a partner in the Dance Training and Accreditation Partnership (DTAP) and together are exploring issues of 'top level' regulation more generally with organisations across the dance sector.

We really want FCD members to begin to engage with this part of the Professional Framework as soon as they can. The Definitions and Values are there to be refined and developed in line with how practice develops. So in the short term we urge you to use the Code of Conduct with your own organisations and employers and, vitally, provide us with feedback about them. You can download the documents from [www.communitydance.org.uk](http://www.communitydance.org.uk) - where you will also find an on-line feedback form.

**contact** [ken@communitydance.org.uk](mailto:ken@communitydance.org.uk) / [chris@communitydance.org.uk](mailto:chris@communitydance.org.uk) or 0116 253 3453 / **visit** [www.communitydance.org.uk](http://www.communitydance.org.uk)

## Definitions

### What is community dance?

Community dance is about professional dance artists working with people. What makes it 'community dance' as distinct from other kinds of participatory dance activity, is determined by:

- The contexts in which it takes place (where, with whom and why)
- Approaches to dance practice that are informed by a set of beliefs and philosophies
- The values that it embodies and promotes.

### Community dance is for anyone and everyone

Community dance creates opportunities for people to access quality experiences in dance irrespective of where they live, their age, gender, sexuality, race, disability, educational attainment or economic circumstance. Participants do not necessarily have aspirations to work professionally in dance, but is recognised to be a valuable and inclusive route to working in dance professionally.

### Community dance happens anywhere and everywhere

Community dance takes place in a range of settings each with a specific set of conditions, with a range of employers, but usually happens outside of statutory education and training settings, or professional performance contexts. It is often self-financing, but often receives subsidy in the form of grants from funding organisations.

### Community dance includes many kinds of dance, dances and dancing

Community dance is not confined to any specific type of dance and is concerned with engaging people creatively and safely in a dance style, or exploring dance ideas and forms of their own. It can involve creating dance for performance, and is centrally concerned with the experience of dancing and the process of making dance, and includes many ways of 'participating' - learning, making, performing, watching and talking about dance

### Community dance is led by highly skilled, professional dance practitioners

Some dance professionals who work in community dance choose to call themselves community dance artists or

practitioners; others 'animateurs', dance leaders or simply dance artists, with no reference to the word 'community'. Some work fulltime in community settings; others combine their work in community dance with professional dance activities in other contexts such as dance lecturing, performing.

### Community dance can:

- Contribute to the development of dance as an art form, and support the artistic development of professional and non-professional dancers
- Impact positively on people's health and well-being, their personal motivation and their social relationships
- Provide people with an important focus for their lives, overcome barriers to participation and enhance peoples' sense of community
- Offer people new ways of relating to other people, based on respect and valuing difference
- Enhance the quality of relationships between people, their communities, their dancing and their dances
- Make a positive contribution to wider social change, and artistic and learning agendas.

## Values

Professionals leading, providing and supporting community dance share a set of values about people, society, art, creativity, learning and the world we live in. These values are central to their work, informing and guiding what they do, why they do it, and how they do it.

### Community dance professionals believe that:

- All people have the right to have creative and expressive lives through the medium of dance: to choose dance and to choose why, how and with whom they dance
- Everybody has the capacity to dance, express themselves and make meaning through dance and that by engaging with it, every individual has a creative and powerful contribution to make to their communities in a safe, supportive environment
- To operate as artists do - with an artist's questions, perspectives, intuitions, feelings and responses; to make sense of and create meaning in the world - is of itself a positive, empowering and humanising activity for people to engage in
- Connecting people to dance experiences over which they have ownership, and through which achieve a sense of belonging, individual's lives and their experiences of being in a community can be changed for the better
- Dance can contribute to the personal and social development, and the health and well-being of

individuals in society

- When it actively engages people as creative participants, dance can help build stronger communities and enhanced engagement with wider social agendas.

### **Community dance practice that embodies these values is about:**

- People enjoying dancing, expressing themselves and their life experiences creatively, learning new things, and connecting to each other, their communities and cultures
- An equal concern for people and art: providing high quality dance experiences, and having a belief in participants that enables them to achieve high quality outcomes in which they can take pride and have a sense of achievement
- Challenging aesthetic norms and broadening perceptions of who can dance, what dance is, and what it might be
- Providing opportunities to explore the art of dance and to have critical engagement with their own dance and the dance of others: asking artistic questions, seeking solutions and reflecting on their dance experiences
- Offering opportunities to gain new skills and insights: learning about dance, in dance and through dance
- Placing people, their aspirations, rights and choices at its heart: recognising the individuality of participants and working with them in ways that support them to find their own dance 'voice'
- Creating a 'safe' space where individuals can fulfil their human and creative potential, where they feel positive about themselves and are respected and valued by others, enabling them to grow, develop, and build positive and active relationships within their wider communities.

## **Code of conduct**

This Code of Conduct translates the core values of community dance into standards of ethical and responsible practice to which community dance professionals adhere. It enables them to be clear and upfront about how they go about their work, their ethical stance on how they approach their work, and the expectations people can have of them in terms of their professional behaviour, actions and attitudes.

The Code covers five areas:

1. Professional competence
2. Responsibility
3. Safety
4. Working with people
5. Commitment to the Code of Conduct

(The following is presented in the first-person tense to reflect actual use)

## **1. Professional competence**

As a professional community dance artist, I believe that I have a responsibility to myself, the profession and the people with whom I work, to do the best I can. I aspire to bring quality to everything I do and commit to investing in my own continuing professional development to ensure the relevance and quality of my practice and uphold the standards of the profession within the relevant and legislative frameworks and government directives.

- I have the necessary range of skills, knowledge and experience for the work I do
- I am clear about the boundaries of my professional competence and work within them
- I am forthcoming and truthful about my professional experience and qualifications
- I do what is necessary to ensure that I am competent to do the work I do and take steps to practice in a fully skilled manner
- I demonstrate my commitment to developing and improving my skills, knowledge and abilities through engaging in ongoing professional development
- I keep up-to-date with developments in practice, training, legislation and agendas that inform my work
- I take responsibility for enabling other people to understand what I do
- I will work within the required health and safety legislation
- I am committed to the principles of equal opportunities and human rights.

## **2. Responsibility**

As a professional community dance artist I work and behave with integrity: being open, trustworthy, sincere and consistent in the way I conduct myself and my work; following this through in my professional relationships and in undertaking my work in a responsible, thorough and accountable manner. I strive to bring credit to the community dance profession and the people I work for and with.

- I do what I say I will do, and take responsibility for my own actions
- I am honest, open and consistent in all my professional and business relationships
- I maintain effective communication and work in a collaborative and cooperative manner with employers, other professionals and organisations
- I prepare thoroughly, and undertake the research and discussion necessary for me and others to understand and agree the context for my work, the aims and desired outcomes, who I will be working with, where and how
- I am clear in advance about the support I need to do my work effectively, and work in partnership with others to ensure this support is available and in place
- I carry out, and keep up to date with, all relevant paperwork and administration to support my work, including that required by my employers and colleagues >

- I charge appropriately for my services, to reflect the extent and quality of the work that I do, and the continuing professional development I undertake
- I ensure that others who might cover my work in my absence have appropriate levels of competence and are adequately informed about the purpose of the session, the context and the participants
- I turn up in time for work (or if I can't communicate this to others in good time)
- I ensure that my appearance and behaviour are appropriate to the context I am working in, the participants I am working with, and present me and my employers in a positive light
- I monitor the quality of my work, seeking and acting on feedback from participants, employers and colleagues
- I reflect on my work and apply what I learn from this to improve my performance
- I will fulfil all my obligations with regard to health and safety, equal opportunities and human rights.

### 3. Safety

As a professional community dance artist I believe that every participant has a right to enjoy their dancing in an environment that provides for their personal safety, and that I have a responsibility to act in the best interests of their physical and mental well being in the work that I do. I am committed to ensuring that my practice is informed by, and complies with, relevant statutory or legal requirements that safeguard my own and others' legal, civil and human rights.

- I take steps to keep informed of any statutory or legal requirements that may affect my work
- I know, or will find out, the extent of my professional responsibilities and liability in relation to the work I do
- I ensure that the dance activities I lead are compliant with the current legislative framework and are in line with current safe dance practice guidelines
- I familiarise myself with the procedures and protocols of the places I work in, and agree with outside employers the policies, processes, roles and responsibilities that will support the safe delivery of my work
- I comply with all statutory requirements affecting health and safety at work and ensure the provision of adequate insurance cover for the work I do
- I understand my legal obligations when working with children or vulnerable adults and ensure I have a relevant CRB disclosure if appropriate
- I have relevant insurance from an accredited broker
- I ensure that risk assessments are carried out on my sessions and I manage risks accordingly
- I ensure that nothing in my control is of detriment to the health, safety and well-being of participants
- I do not take on, or continue with work that I cannot do safely, and ensure that I report to the appropriate person when safety is compromised
- I encourage participants to take active responsibility for their own welfare, behaviour and actions, and assist other

- staff and supporters to participate safely and happily
- I undertake any necessary monitoring, record keeping and reporting around issues of consent and confidentiality to maintain a safe working environment
- I set, agree, and monitor clear and appropriate personal boundaries to ensure the integrity of my relationships with participants and employers.

### 4. Working with people

As a professional community dance artist I believe that everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and recognised as an independent and equal human being. I celebrate the diversity of human experience, strive to support and enhance the autonomy of the individuals I work with and ensure that nothing I do discriminates on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, age, disability, national or social origin or other status.

- I work in an open, encouraging and sensitive manner to create an inclusive and supportive environment in which individual experiences, abilities and interests are acknowledged and given space to be shared
- I create time / space to build relationships that acknowledge and respect individual difference, perception and need
- I invite feedback, encourage input from individuals, and build positively on their contributions; I am willing to be a co-learner and share ownership of the dance activity
- I enable and assist individuals to make independent choices and decisions
- I use appropriate and inclusive language that can be understood by all participants, is culturally appropriate and enables individuals to access the dance experience
- I respect and acknowledge the position, experience and expertise of other specialist and support staff
- I am aware of, and able to take responsibility for my own well-being, and enable other people to take responsibility for their behaviour and relationships with others

### 5. Commitment to the Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct sets out what you can expect of me as a professional community dance artist. If you feel that I have not fulfilled this code in spirit or in action, I will commit:

- I will strive to be reflective in my work and will listen, and respond appropriately to, your feedback
- I will enter into an open and constructive discussion with you about your concerns
- I will take responsibility for taking steps to review, and change if appropriate, my actions, behaviours or conduct.