



# Exploring a Dance Health Model for Scotland

Project Report



SB Health participants and staff  
take part in Time to Dance® class  
at Wing Hong Chinese Elderly Centre.  
Photo by Sally Jubb.

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‘My balance and strength have improved, and this makes me more confident to do other activities. I like being able to say that ‘I do ballet’ and this makes me confident too.’

SB Health participant feedback



SB staff and participants take part in Healing Arts Scotland event. Photo by Sally Jubb.



# Introduction

## **The dance begins...**

Scottish Ballet is Scotland's national dance company, based at Tramway in Glasgow. Since 1969 Scottish Ballet's award-winning performances have taken place all over Scotland; from our biggest cities to our most remote communities. We also tour the world, promoting Scotland's diverse and pioneering spirit far and wide. Our mission is to inspire on stage and beyond; we aim to move people by sharing our passion and creating exceptional dance.

We are proud to be an international centre for dance health, dedicated to improving lives through the delivery of specialist dance health programmes, research, and training.

SB Health is Scottish Ballet's health initiative. Since 2013, we have been dancing with young people who have faced adversity in childhood, families who live with neurological conditions, and more recently, offering wellbeing support for health professionals and people living with long Covid.

Our three neurological dance health programmes provide support to people living with Parkinson's, dementia, and multiple sclerosis. The programmes have been carefully designed to support self-management of symptoms, whilst offering a safe space for fun, expression and social connection.

Through our work with healthcare professionals, we became aware of the potential power of SB Health to support the health and social care system in tackling pressing societal challenges in health and community wellbeing. This report shares the impact and learning from a three-year strategic project which tested a model of accessing dance health on prescription in Scotland, delivered in collaboration with The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (The ALLIANCE).

The aim of the project was to explore the steps required to embed Scottish Ballet's three neurological dance health programmes within mainstream health and social care, so that more people living with neurological conditions in Scotland, and their families, can access our evidence-based support.

We hope this report offers context for anyone considering the role of arts in health and provides a suggested framework for implementation.







Care staff take part in an awareness-raising session with SB Health staff.  
Photo by Andy Ross.





# What Did We Do?

## Defining success

As we developed our project vision, we set the following outcomes to monitor progress and success.

1. More people living with neurological conditions access SB Health
2. People living with neurological conditions feel more resilient
3. Health professionals increase their understanding of SB Health
4. Health professionals increase confidence in SB Health
5. Scottish Ballet increases evidence of the impact of SB Health neurological programmes

## Building capacity

We applied four interventions which were key to achieving our project outcomes.

### 1. A cross-sector project partner

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (The ALLIANCE) are a national third sector intermediary for health and social care. They have strategic relationships with Scottish Government, NHS Boards, academic institutions and key organisations spanning health, social care, housing and digital technology. The ALLIANCE manage a network of Community Links Workers across Greater Glasgow, and their membership of 3600 individuals and organisations includes people living with long term conditions, disabled people and unpaid carers, as well as small, medium and large third sector organisations.



SB Health participants and staff take part in a Time to Dance® class. Photo by Brian Hartley.



Scottish Ballet and The ALLIANCE have a shared ethos that places the voice of lived experience at the heart of design and delivery. Throughout the project The ALLIANCE helped SB Health to better understand and navigate the landscape of health and social care and offered guidance, advocacy and mentorship.

## **2. A Health Partnerships Manager role**

Having a dedicated Health Partnerships Manager gave us an opportunity to bring a trusted health professional into the dance health team. The position was created to test and explore capacity for improved access to dance health service delivery in Scotland. This was strengthened through their direct working knowledge of the health sector. The role was supported by both Scottish Ballet and The ALLIANCE.

Over 24 months, the Health Partnerships Manager developed relationships with senior members of health and social care staff across Scotland that allowed us to:

- Explore optimal pathways from health and social care into and out of SB Health neurological programmes
- Design and deliver awareness raising and information sessions for health and social care professionals
- Establish a project advisory group, helping to better steer and understand some of the potential challenges and enablers throughout the project
- Advocate for the role of dance health as a member of the Scottish Social Prescribing Network board

## **3. A sustainable delivery model**

Building on our regular in-studio dance health classes in Glasgow, Tayside, and Orkney, Scottish Ballet developed a sophisticated hybrid offering which responded to user feedback and increased capacity for access. A pilot phase of the hybrid model ensured classes could be accessed safely online, across Scotland, including people living in remote or rural areas. Dance health classes include bespoke movement, live music and social time, all delivered within a specially considered environment that supports physical, social and emotional wellbeing.

## **4. External evaluation**

Identifying a gap in our evidence base, Scottish Ballet commissioned Dr. Emily Davis, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, to undertake an external evaluation of the views of healthcare professionals in Scotland. The evaluation captures their understanding, experience, or perception of potential for social prescription via SB Health. Emily's final report is available late Spring 2025.





SB Health participant and staff take part in dance health class in Lewis.  
Photo by Ken Amer.

## Defining scope

We considered the factors that might influence or impact on our work, by mapping:

- Key individuals, teams, networks, organisations or communities with a potential role to play in SB Health's longer-term development
- Scotland's health and social care landscape and priorities
- Relevant Social, Technological, Environmental, Economic and Political factors, and what these might mean for our future planning

The project team focused geographic scope to maximise impact. Three territorial health board areas were selected on the basis of their different qualities and there being existing SB Health infrastructure. Interest from other areas emerged independently.

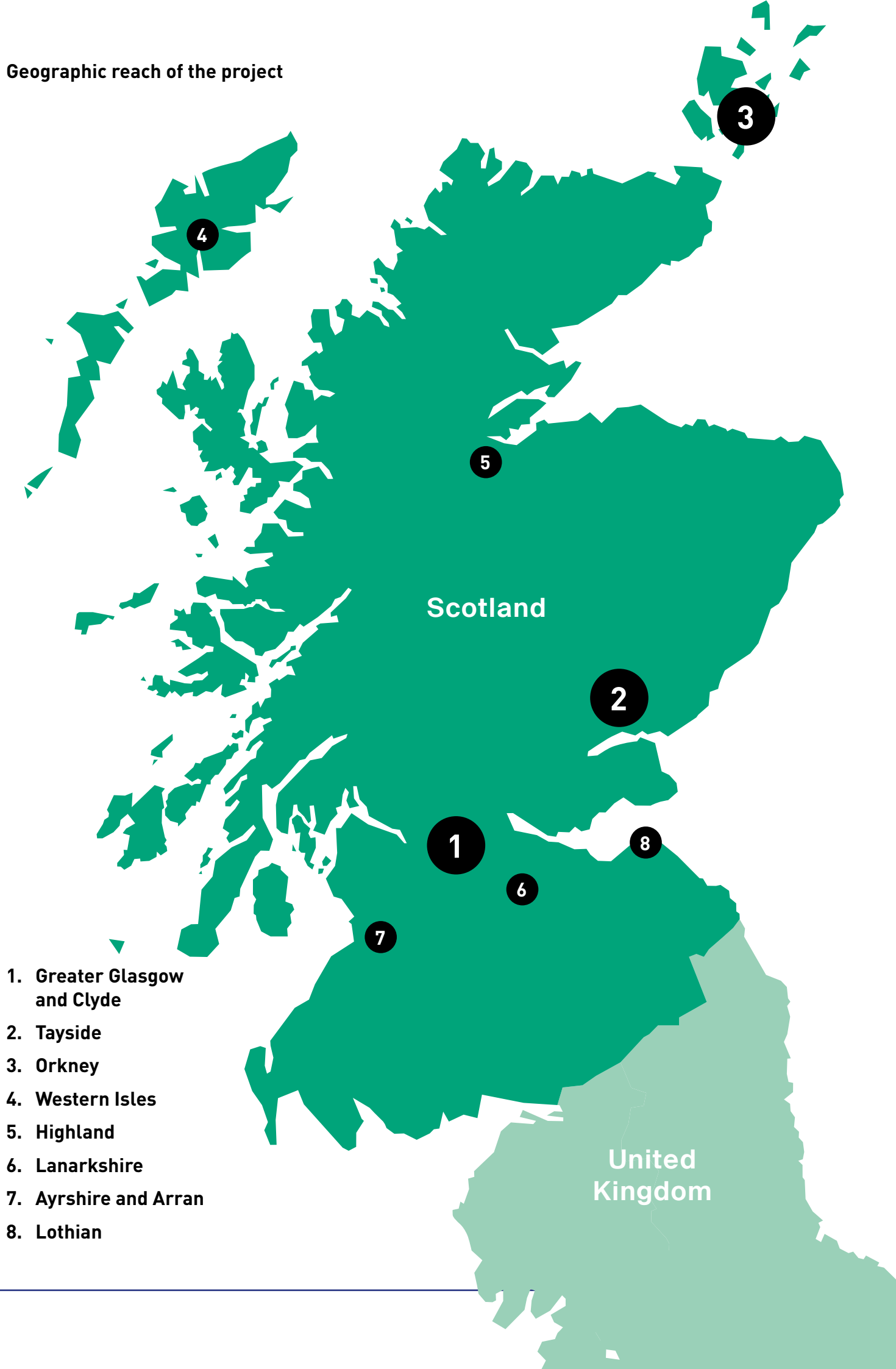
- Orkney
- Tayside
- Greater Glasgow and Clyde

We offered access to Scottish Ballet's three neurological programmes.

- Dance for Parkinson's Scotland
- Dementia-friendly Time to Dance®
- SB Elevate® for people living with multiple sclerosis



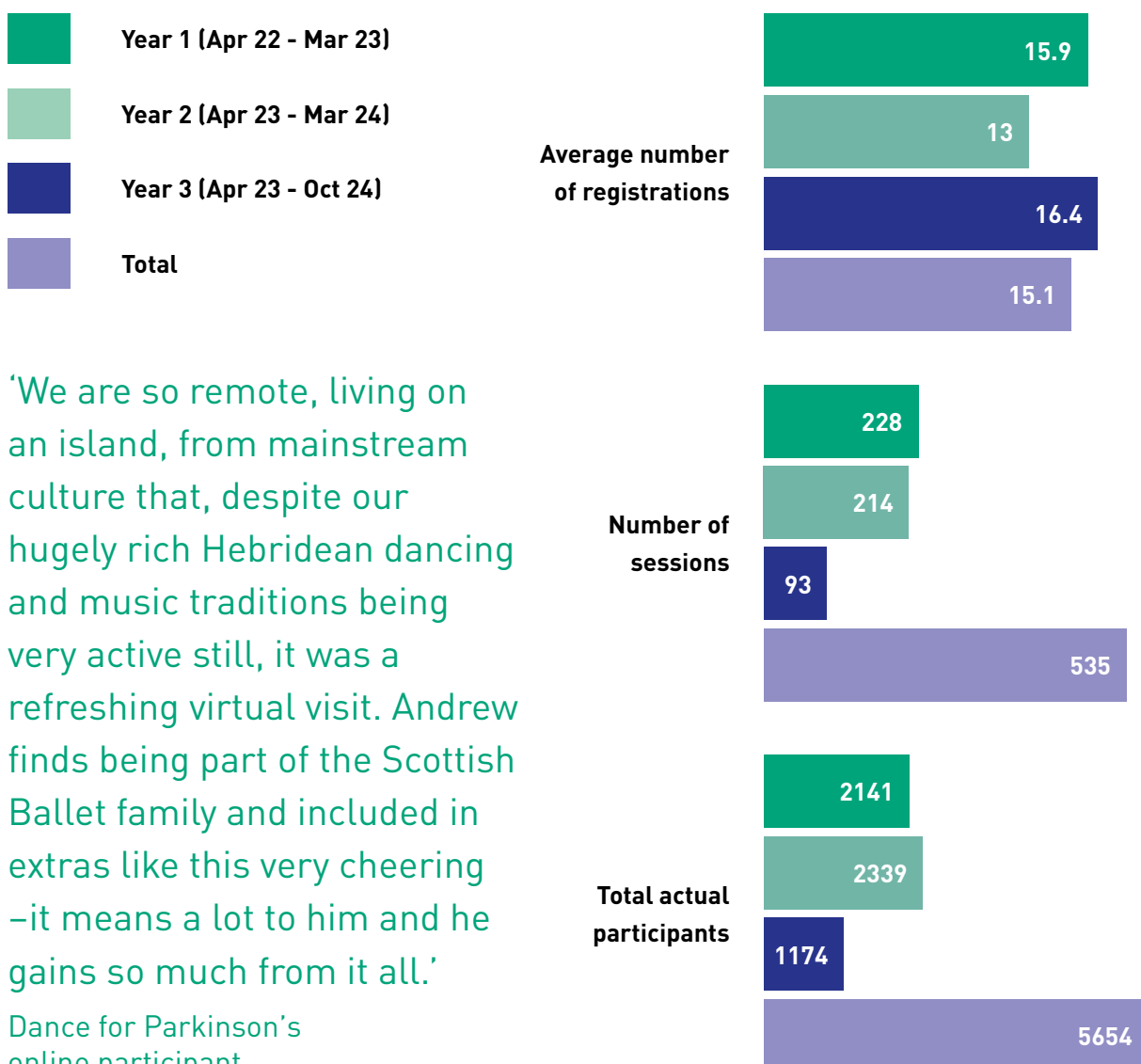
## Geographic reach of the project



## Bespoke delivery of dance health classes

During this project, Scottish Ballet delivered 535 neurological dance health sessions across ten geographic locations, including remote areas of Scotland, involving 5654 participations. The offer included in-person or online access, single taster classes or longer blocks at Scottish Ballet's headquarters in Glasgow, or healthcare and community settings.

To help generate interest and encourage wider engagement the Health Partnerships Manager worked with multiple stakeholders, promoting access to the classes for their patients or service users and their care partners with the view to longer-term commitment. This helped to build evidence of demand in the local area and respond to local needs.







Care staff, participant and SB Health staff take part in a SB Health class in care setting. Photo by Andy Ross.

‘[I attend online as] It is too difficult to attend in person because I do not drive and live too far away. I also find dressing harder now.’

Dance for Parkinson’s Scotland survey response

### Reducing barriers, increasing scale and reach

People living rurally or remotely from a city centre can face barriers to access classes held in city centre locations. During this project we tested a new delivery model where remote or rurally-located groups facilitated by a health, or third sector professional joined our live hybrid classes from their local community or care setting. The groups benefitted from social time, a safe space to move in, and the connection to Scottish Ballet’s expertise and studios. We also offered access to individuals and their family members joining from home.

To encourage the feeling of community and being part of the wider Scottish Ballet family, we created opportunities for both remote and in-person participants to watch our professional company in rehearsals.



SB Health participants and staff take part in a hybrid class. Photo by Andy Ross.

## Raising awareness

To support increased understanding and awareness of SB Health we delivered a tailored programme of information sessions for healthcare professionals, ranging from fifteen minutes to one hour.

Sessions were offered to health and care professionals working in primary care, community link workers, secondary care, third sector, executive leadership, allied health professionals, and policy teams.

In response to staff wellbeing priorities in health board areas, Scottish Ballet also offered Health at Hand® wellbeing support for health professionals. These sessions helped build relationships and meant staff could experience the therapeutic benefits of dance firsthand. During the project the dance health team engaged with 458 health and care professionals.

***'I didn't know these classes existed, so great to see there's something a bit different out there that my patients could potentially access.'***

Awareness raising session feedback

Staff from the Ninewells specialist neurological team participated in our dance for MS classes. Enabling them to understand the experience and confidently signpost patients.

***'It was wonderful to see our patients in a different environment who were clearly enjoying it and to hear first-hand the positive impact the class is having on them.'***

MS Specialist Nurse

## Inspiring the future

During the project, SB Health hosted 21 healthcare student placements and internships. Welcoming students from University of St. Andrew's, University of Dundee, University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh — supporting the next generation of health professionals. Students contributed to advocacy, evaluation and the creation of information resources.

***'I hope that dance health, particularly Scottish Ballet's work, could be incorporated more into the curriculum of healthcare students, so there is more awareness of the power of dance and music earlier on in a healthcare professional career.'***

Healthcare student





## Healing Arts Scotland

As part of Scottish Ballet's journey in arts and health, the company formed a connection with World Health Organization (WHO). This led to an opportunity to deliver Healing Arts Scotland (HAS) 2024, in collaboration with Jameel Arts and Health Lab and the WHO — a nation-wide weeklong event celebrating and advocating for improved physical, mental and social health through the arts.

Scottish Ballet worked closely with colleagues from Scottish Government to plan and host roundtable events across the week, including convening representatives from UK, Ireland and globally to explore innovation and excellence in social prescribing.

HAS leveraged support from senior leaders working within Culture and Health, serving as a catalyst for cross-sector dialogue.

Poster created by 4th year medical student University of Dundee. 2024.

**Social Prescribing: Multiple Sclerosis Elevate**  
Scottish Ballet

<https://scottishballet.co.uk/move-with-us/dance-classes/sb-elevate/>  
@scottishballet

**01 Improvement of Balance and Walking Ability**  
42% of participants in a recent study found that their balance improved by the end of a 10 week ballet health programme, and 58% found that their ataxia became less severe

**02 Decrease in Fatigue**  
Study by Scottish Ballet found a significant reduction in fatigue levels of participants from baseline to endpoint over a 10 week period

**03 Enhanced Body Confidence and Awareness**  
One of the main aims of the Elevate class is to improve body confidence and awareness through practical applications (eg. pushing bodyweight into the floor during standing exercises). One participant in the class said "That's probably the thing I'm getting the most out of it. It's the confidence, and feeling stronger"

**04 Reduced Isolation and Loneliness**  
78% of participants interviewed by 'MS Society' said that being part of a local group reduced their sense of loneliness

**References**

[1] Scheidler, A.M. et al. (2018) Targeted ballet program mitigates ataxia and improves balance in females with mild-to-moderate multiple sclerosis. PubMed. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30335774/>.

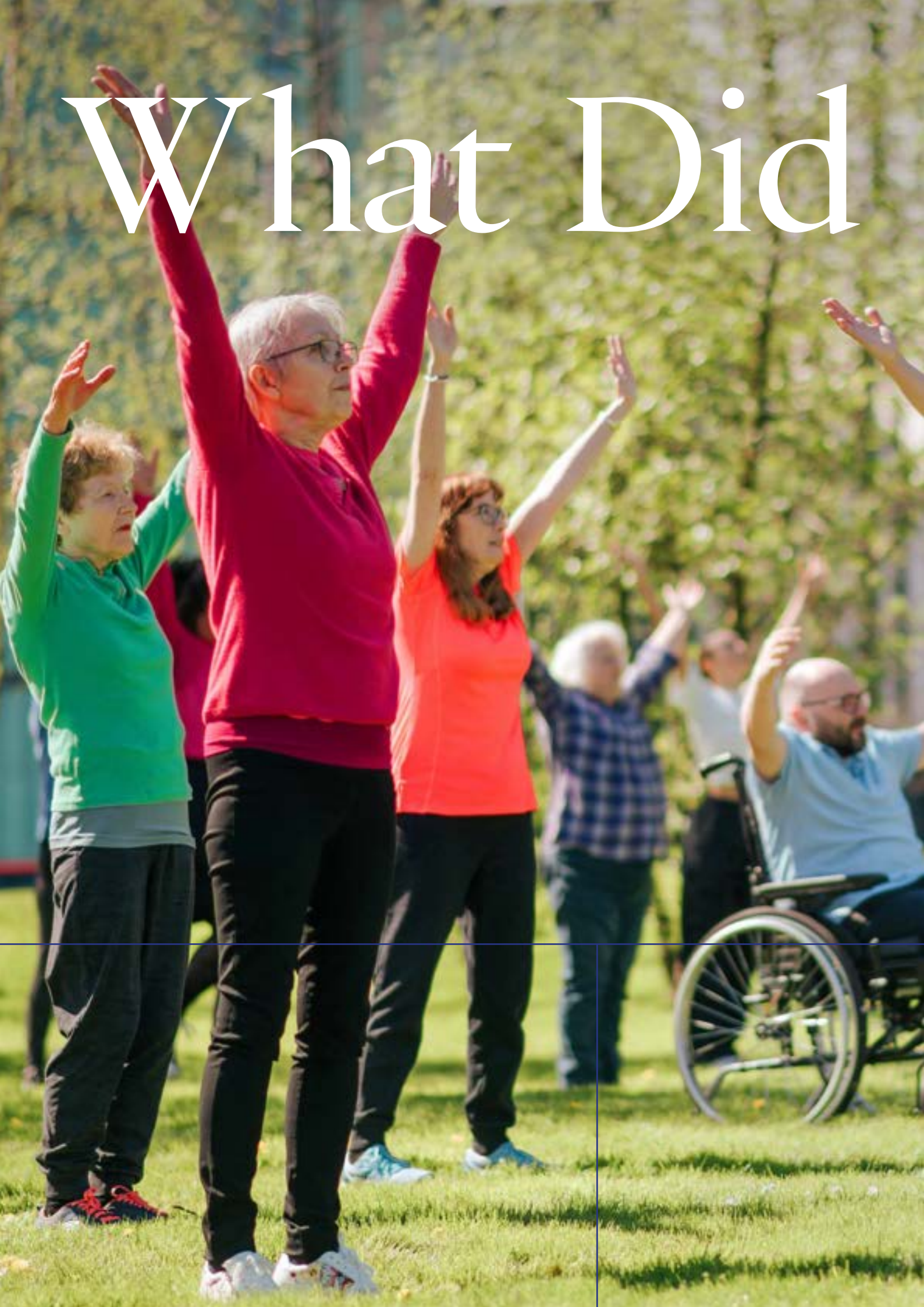
[2] [3] Whiteside, B. and Ruckert, C. (2020) Elevate+: Exploring the Impact of a Dance for Multiple Sclerosis Programme. rep. Available at: [https://scottish-ballet-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2023/06/Elevate\\_-\\_Research-Report\\_-\\_Whiteside-2020-1.pdf](https://scottish-ballet-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2023/06/Elevate_-_Research-Report_-_Whiteside-2020-1.pdf).

[4] Hepworth, J. and Nathan, H. (2018) Evaluation of MS Society local groups' role in reducing loneliness for people affected by MS. publication. Available at: <https://www.mssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-08/Local-groups---Reducing-Loneliness-and-Isolation.pdf>.

SB Health Participants and staff take part in a Dance for Parkinson's class. Photo by Andy Ross.

## Realistic Medicine

Scotland's Chief Medical Officer (CMO) chose to launch his Realistic Medicine 2024 report at the Healing Arts Scotland event hosted by Scottish Ballet. The CMO's vision for Realistic Medicine helps to position arts and health interventions as viable, evidence-based options that add value on many levels, supporting people to make informed choices about their care. SB Health is strongly aligned with and supports this ethos and vision.



# What Did



# We Learn?



Healthcare staff, dancers from SB Health, Scottish Ballet's Youth Exchange and Youth Creative Collective programmes dance together at Queen Elizabeth University Hospital. Photo by Mihaela Bodlovic.



### What 'social prescribing' means

Our initial vision was to explore dance health as an offer within existing 'social prescribing' frameworks. From the outset, Scottish Ballet was inspired by World Health Organization's definition of social prescribing: 'a means of connecting patients to a range of non-clinical services in the community to improve their health and well-being.' World Health Organization (2019), *A toolkit on how to implement social prescribing*.

Across the globe social prescribing takes many formats within community and health settings. In Scotland, we discovered, this mechanism is typically supported by Community Links Workers within a Primary Care setting. For that reason, the construct of 'social prescribing' carried expectations that things would be delivered via specific people using a specific pathway. This was limiting given Scottish Ballet's connections across multiple areas of health and social care, with a wide range of delivery modes and access points.

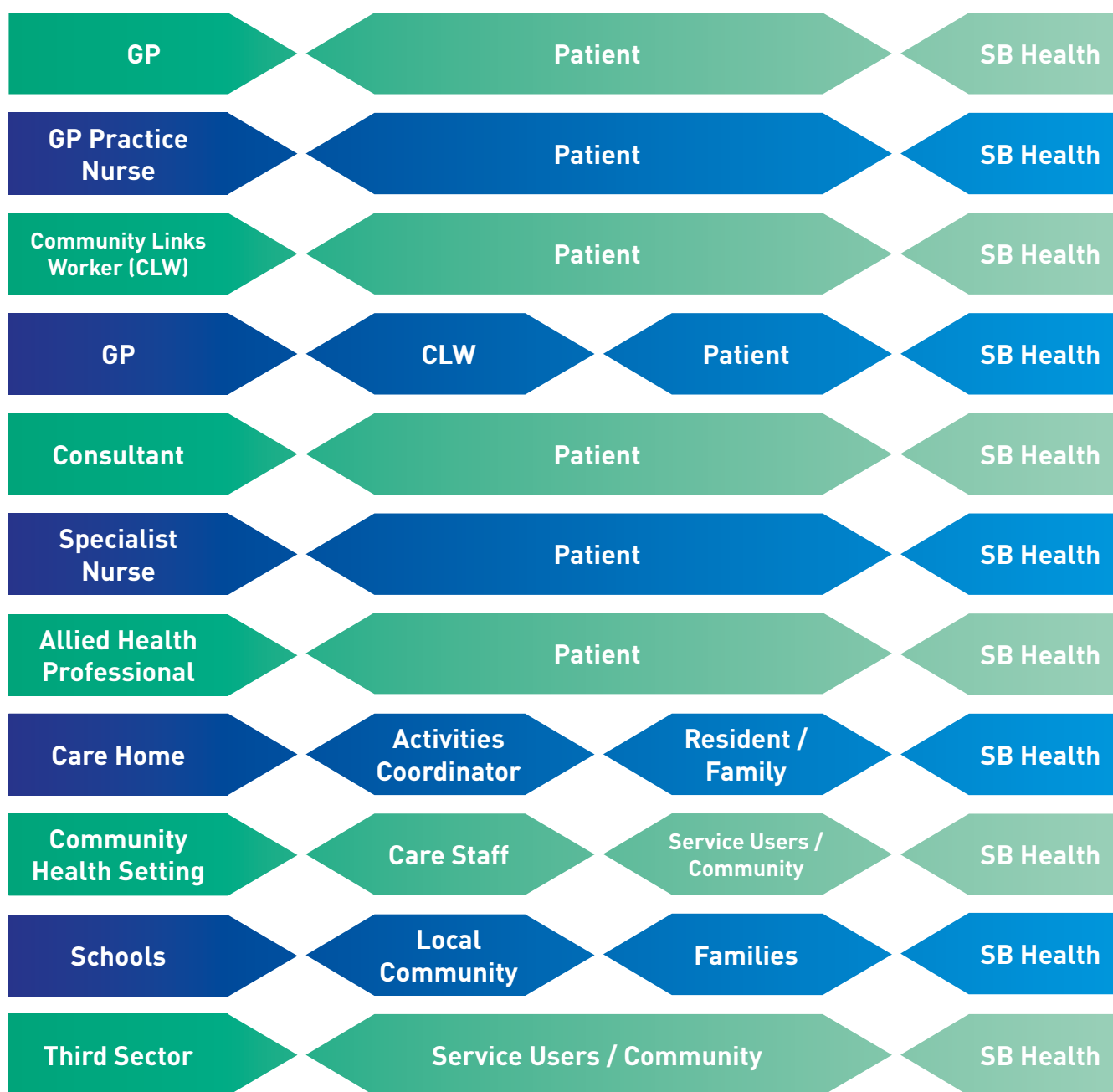
We observed great enthusiasm and recognition of SB Health from professionals working across health and social care throughout the project.



SB Health staff and participants take part in a community class, Glasgow. Photo by Sally Jubb.

## Pathways

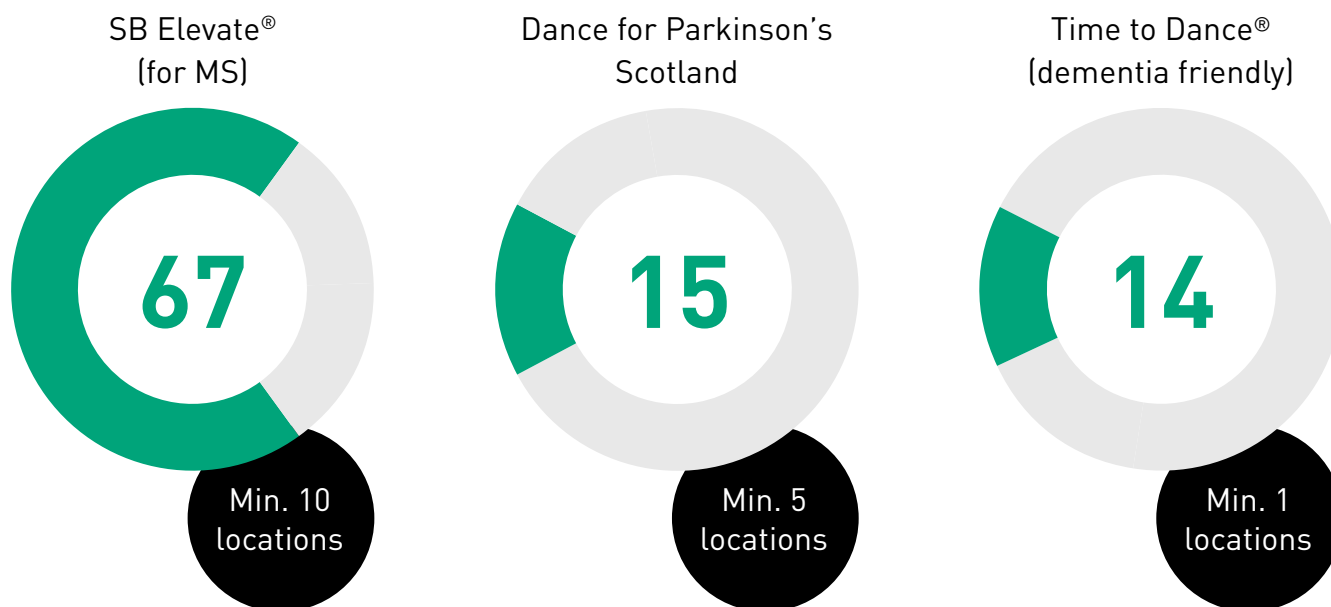
Scottish Ballet has explored a range of access routes throughout the development of its dance health model. We realise that there are as many routes out of SB Health as there are in.



The Health Partnership Manager's strategic input created 96 new weekly class sign-ups from trusted professionals, a threefold increase. This was in addition to ongoing self-referrals from individuals, and invitations to deliver dance health activity in community or care settings. Specialist neurological respite centres and support groups engaged with the hybrid classes. Centre staff facilitated residents or service users to join classes together as a group, followed by social time.



## Signposting during project period



### Programme preference

Each neurological dance health programme was well received across a range of settings, with SB Elevate receiving highest levels of engagement. The reason for this could be active support from MS specialist teams and a high prevalence of MS in the three target regions.

### Barriers

The Health Partnership Manager's discussions with healthcare professionals highlighted staff capacity as a potential barrier in signposting patients to SB Health. Clear, succinct information and simple access routes were suggested. The project team applied this feedback to the creation of its promotional materials.

Community links workers expressed the importance of considering financial or physical barriers for patients including transport (in-person classes), digital poverty (online classes), or where there were competing demands for more basic needs to be met first (e.g. living costs, winter clothing etc). This provided helpful context for the team and supported us to improve access.

Whilst the word 'ballet' was a draw for most, initial perceptions also created confusion or hesitance. This stresses the importance of awareness-raising efforts, as highlighted in Dr. Emily Davis' evaluation:

'If I said 'Scottish Ballet' before 'Elevate', I could see people's reactions. It was like, 'Why is [this health professional] suggesting this?' But the more confident I got, after attending and experiencing it, I was able to promote it better. I've become more confident saying, 'Look, I have attended, I've seen it first-hand, people of all abilities attended, and it's accessible for all.' That has been helpful.'

## SCOTTISH BALLET HEALTH



### Dance Sessions for Multiple Sclerosis: SB Elevate®

Move with us from Leuchie House, joining our dance health sessions that have been specially tailored to connect you live into Scottish Ballet's studio. These fun classes aim to support the physical, mental and social wellbeing of people living with MS.

**Dance for MS (SB Elevate®): Mondays 10.00 – 11.30am GMT**

No dance experience is required, and the movement includes a variety of seated and standing movement. New participants are always welcome to join at any point during the term.

Each class is led by a team of dance health specialists and is accompanied by live music.

For more information about the programme visit:  
[www.scottishballet.co.uk/sb-elevate](http://www.scottishballet.co.uk/sb-elevate).

 Scottish  
Government  
Riaghaidh  
na h-Alba  
Photography by Andy Ross.  
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No SC046497 Scottish Charity  
No SC098077

**SB Health  
Promotional  
Information**

### **Speaking the same language**

As a movement-based, expressive artform, dance can support physical, social and emotional wellbeing outcomes. Specific terms such as 'self-management' and 'activities of daily living' became particularly important when articulating the benefits of our three neurological programmes to healthcare professionals. Dance health programmes respond to health and care needs such as 'reducing loneliness and isolation', 'falls prevention' and 'brain health'.

### **Did it work?**

Feedback from participants told us that dance health classes empower patients to self-manage symptoms and actively participate in daily life and community activities, resulting in a boost in confidence and improved wellbeing:

***'Starting the week with the Elevate class always leaves me feeling positive and gives me energy and motivation to take part in other activities in the week ahead.'***

***'I have more confidence in my ability to move around.'***

***'I remind myself to sit, stand and walk tall.'***

***'Some of the leg and foot movements are helpful in using muscles for functional tasks eg. putting on socks and shoes.'***

***'Balance improved.'***

***'I have never danced before - I am 65 - and am thrilled to be given this opportunity - I love every minute of the classes! I have learned to relax and try movements which are completely new to me. Even where I have struggled because of my disability, I have often been surprised at what I am able to do after a few sessions.'***

***'Mum enjoys the class, and as I work full time it's great to be able to do something with her.'***

***'I exercise more and pay more attention to my body than I used to pre-diagnosis and I always want to be fit enough to take part in the Elevate class, that part of my weekly routine is so very important to me.'***

***'I have more self confidence.'***

***'Go to more clubs now.'***

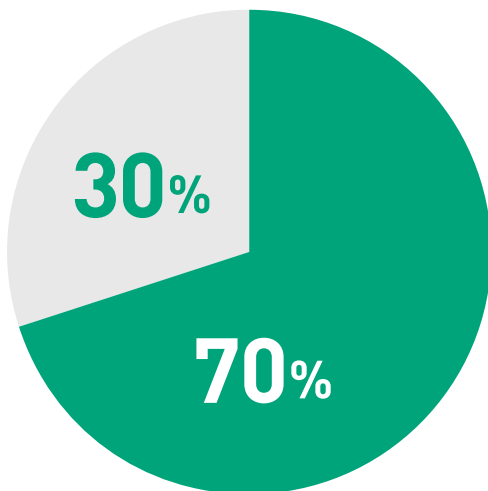
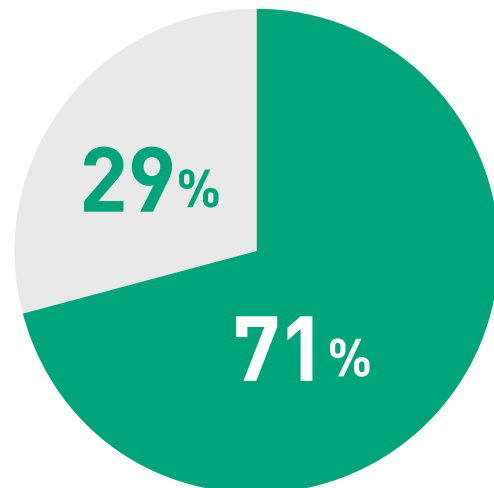
***'It encouraged me to try to go back to our local Gaelic choir.'***





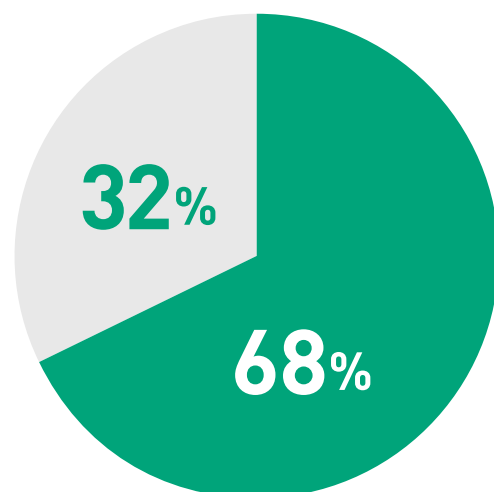
Do you feel that attending the class positively contributes to your general feeling of wellbeing?

Since starting classes, do you feel more inclined to do other activities during the week? Activities can include anything from food shopping, go for a walk, swimming, visit friends etc.



Have you made any new friendships as a result of the class?

Have the classes helped provide you with a network of support?



Based on 101 survey responses



### **Understanding healthcare professionals' perspectives**

An external evaluation completed by Dr. Emily Davis, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, captured the perceptions of individuals connected to SB Health via Scottish health and social care networks. This work and its findings complement existing data from people with lived experience. The evaluation explored health professionals' understanding of dance health, their confidence in signposting patients, and its influence on their practice and the wider landscape. A recurring theme was the comparison of dance health 'prescription' to pharmaceutical prescription, which highlighted barriers such as awareness, lack of process and ease of access. A striking finding was the value of a healthcare professional's first-hand experience of dance health. This shifted the dial in favour of adding dance health to the range of options a health and care professional would consider for their patients. Our hope is that prescribing a dance health class eventually becomes as easy as prescribing a pill, so this feedback was encouraging.



Healthcare professionals told us:

***'We spend a huge amount on drugs, less on patient well-being. People might be physically better, but could feel better. Dance shouldn't be an extra, it should be part and parcel. The effect of being fit is as good as some first-line drugs. The benefit is very large, and without it, people can be stuck in their house for years. It's more than a luxury; it empowers patients to take control.'***

***'When it comes up against funding a new treatment, I don't see why it shouldn't be in the mix. For some, this is exactly what they need. We need to understand the frailty of the pharmaceutical model, because it can only take us so far. There's a deeper source of how people feel about themselves that we're just starting to understand.'***

***'The answer is not medicine, the answer is something that creates health and well-being, and dance and music do that. If I want to maintain my healthcare service, we need to help prevent people from getting ill from preventable stuff, and some of that is through culture, education, sport, and physical activity. The fact that Scottish Ballet has committed so much to this model, built networks of their dance health, and provided programmes, predominantly neurological but increasingly broader, is how these things should be interdigitating. Why wouldn't I advocate for that?'***

***'Myself and my colleague attended the Elevate class at the beginning of the year to get an experience of it first-hand. When we're promoting things to our patients, I think it's very important to get that experience so we're able to promote it as best we can. It was a fantastic experience to actually take part in a class.'***



SB Health participants  
take part in SB Duet,  
bedside ballet session.  
Photo by Andy Ross.



# Our Next Steps





### Where do we go from here?

As Scotland develops its own social prescribing framework, Scottish Ballet sees this as an excellent opportunity for the arts to become more formally recognised and visible in the health sector. Growing global evidence, including the voices of those with lived experience, is generating momentum and understanding in the benefits of the arts to support health outcomes, economic and social impact. We would like to see the arts, and more specifically dance, given the same recognition as exercise-based, or green prescribing initiatives when considering community-assets.

In Scotland, Scottish Ballet will continue contributing to wider arts and health networks, and use its connections with senior leaders at Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland to play an active role in keeping arts on the agenda of ongoing discussions.

The Scottish Government is keen to see a shift in the balance of acute care through strengthening and promoting community-based health and care initiatives. Our hope is that this will create opportunities for Scottish Ballet, and other arts and third sector organisations, to contribute to ongoing discussions around supporting communities to thrive.



‘Scottish Ballet are at the forefront  
of this exciting network and their  
Dance for Parkinson’s class is an  
excellent example of how the arts can  
contribute meaningfully to improve  
people’s experience of chronic disease,  
whilst also improving social contact.’

(Crown Copyright, 2024. Realistic Medicine – Taking Care,  
Chief Medical Officer for Scotland Annual Report 23-24)





In summary, this project identified key considerations for developing a dance health implementation framework:

**Strategic Alignment:** Define scope, build partnerships, align with policy and establish dedicated leadership. Consider implications of public sector financial challenges in future planning.

**Project Design:** Develop evidence-based, co-designed, and scalable programmes promoting self-management and flexible access. Encourage cross-sector planning and collaboration.

**Capacity & Education:** Educate professionals, build dance health team capacity, and provide accessible resources.

**Quality & Impact:** Ensure safety, address access barriers, incorporate lived experience, and build/share evidence.

**And finally, remember that creativity, fun, and connection are central to this work!**



# With thanks

Scottish Ballet thanks the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, and everyone who has been part of the SB Health strategic project.

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Baillie Gifford, SB Health (neurological) partner

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Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba