CARE TO DANCE

IMPACT REPORT 2026



WELCOME

As I reflect, on the past year at Care to Dance, I feel incredibly proud of what we have achieved, and deeply grateful to the young people, teams, partners and supporters who make our work possible.



What has stood out to me most this year is the strength of the communities we have built. Across our programmes, I've seen young people grow in confidence, make friendships, support one another and become increasingly comfortable being themselves. I've seen hundreds of young people have opportunities to shine and, just as importantly, to celebrate each other.

Seeing young people show love to each other, and to themselves, is one of the things I'm most proud of.

As Care to Dance has developed, we've also learnt more about what makes these communities work. We know that creating opportunities is important, but it is the relationships, consistency, care and expertise around those opportunities that enable young people to engage and feel that they belong.

Creating genuinely inclusive, trauma-informed spaces takes skill and awareness, and we've continued to develop our practice and our understanding of what young people need from us.

This year has also been an important one for taking that learning beyond our own communities.

We've strengthened our relationships with local authorities and Virtual Schools, contributed to national conversations about opportunities for care-experienced young people, and shared our learning with professionals across social care, education and the dance sector.

From contributing to Local Government Association guidance to delivering trauma-informed training for dance practitioners and working with organisations including Coram, we've increasingly been able to bring the experience and expertise of Care to Dance into wider systems.

Our young people are central to that work.

Their experiences and perspectives help us understand what needs to change, while our role is to bring those insights, alongside our professional expertise and evidence, into the conversations that can influence practice and opportunity.

I'm proud that Care to Dance is becoming not only a place where young people can belong and thrive, but also a trusted voice in conversations about what care-experienced young people need and deserve.

I'm incredibly grateful to everyone who makes this possible, and I look forward to seeing many more young people grow, thrive and shine in the years ahead.



Beth Vecchione
Founder, Care to Dance



BELONGING MATTERS.
COMMUNITY MATTERS.

WHO WE ARE

Care to Dance is a national charity supporting care-experienced children and young people aged 5-25 through dance, community and trauma-informed practice.

Our ambition is for all care-experienced young people to have the potential to grow, thrive, belong and live a more hopeful life.

"If it wasn't for Care to Dance, I wouldn't have the confidence I have today.

It has given me so many opportunities to grow in confidence and develop my skills.

I have since grown to be a dance teacher and now I help so many other children."

"Both of my boys love coming to Care to Dance, and it was genuinely lovely seeing them perform alongside all of the other children.

Seeing how much Care to Dance has grown, and how many children are getting so much from it, was really special.

I was so proud of my son, who has additional needs, being on stage - he absolutely loved it and did so well."



2025-26 AT A GLANCE

From local communities to national conversations, 2025-26 was a year of growth, connection and increasing influence.

500+
care-experienced young people supported across England

80+
young people working towards dance leadership qualifications

60+
dance practitioners receiving trauma-informed CPD

19
local authorities involved in celebration events

40+
community events across the country

12
young people working as Dance Teaching Assistants



WHAT WE DO

We bring together dance and social work expertise to create consistent, supportive communities where young people can build trusted relationships, develop confidence, improve their wellbeing and experience a strong sense of belonging.

Our work is rooted in the belief that **every care-experienced young person should have opportunities to develop their potential and shape a positive future.**

We create spaces where young people can express themselves, develop skills, experience a sense of achievement and build relationships with people who understand and support them.

Our approach combines professional dance expertise, social work knowledge and trauma-informed practice. This enables us to understand the different experiences and needs of care-experienced young people, respond flexibly and create environments where they can participate, develop and thrive.

Alongside our direct work with young people, we share our expertise and learning with the adults and organisations around them, working with local authorities, Virtual Schools, social care, education and the wider dance sector to help improve opportunities and experiences for care-experienced young people.



THE NEED FOR A DIFFERENT KIND OF COMMUNITY.

There are around 81,770 children currently in care in England, and thousands more young people who have left care and are navigating adulthood.

Care-experienced young people are more likely than their peers to experience challenges across education, employment, health and wellbeing. These inequalities can have a lasting impact on their opportunities and aspirations as they move into adulthood.

The latest national data shows that 40% of care leavers aged 19-21 were not in education, employment or training (NEET) in 2025, compared with an estimated 15% of all young people of the same age. Among care leavers aged 22, 28% were NEET.

Educational outcomes also remain significantly poorer for children who have experienced care, with differences in attainment, attendance and exclusion contributing to the challenges many face in progressing through education and into employment.

These outcomes don't define care-experienced young people or their potential.

But they do tell us something important about the inequalities they are navigating, and the importance of opportunities that support wellbeing, relationships, confidence, development and longer-term aspirations.

Care-experienced young people can also experience significant disruption and instability in their lives, including changes in home, school, relationships and the professionals around them. For some, this can make it harder to build trusted relationships, feel a sense of belonging and consistently access opportunities.

Safe, consistent spaces to build relationships and feel a sense of belonging can therefore be particularly important. Young people need opportunities to spend time with others, develop trusted relationships and feel accepted for who they are, particularly when other parts of their lives may have involved considerable change.

Having access to these kinds of opportunities can support young people's wellbeing and confidence, while helping them to develop skills, experience achievement and become more open to opportunities in education, employment and wider life.

The challenge is not a lack of potential. It is ensuring that care-experienced young people have the opportunities and support they need to realise it.



WHAT CHANGES WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE BELONG.

Our impact is not one-dimensional. Belonging, relationships, wellbeing and hope are all interconnected; when young people feel safe and connected, they can begin to build confidence, experience achievement and feel more able to try new things and imagine what might be possible for their future.



BELONGING & RELATIONSHIPS

For many young people, belonging is one of the most important things they describe about Care to Dance.

The relationships young people build are an important part of this - with other young people, with their teachers and with the wider Care to Dance community.





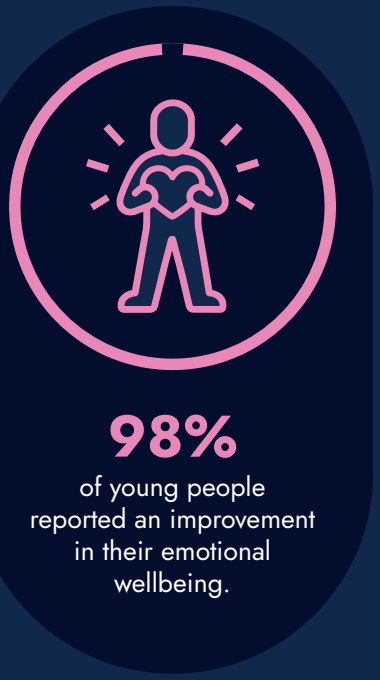
97%
of young people said they have made friends at Care to Dance.

96%
said Care to Dance provides a safe and supportive environment.

77%
said they feel more connected to others.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Dance gives young people a way to move, express themselves and experience positive emotions. For some, it provides an important outlet for feelings that can be difficult to put into words.



98%
of young people reported an improvement in their emotional wellbeing.



80%
of young people reported improved physical wellbeing.



76%
of carers and supporting professionals reported an improvement in their emotional wellbeing.



82%
reported improved physical wellbeing.



"Dance was the only place I felt happy. It gave me an emotional outlet where I could move how I wanted and be free. When I come to Care to Dance, my mental health gets better - I feel happy and like myself again."

Young person

CONFIDENCE & PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

For some young people, this means finding their voice, speaking to new people or feeling more comfortable being themselves. For others, it means taking on a new challenge, developing skills or discovering that they can do something they didn't previously think was possible.

"I feel like a totally different person now. I've grown in confidence and I'm able to be myself without worrying about what people think."

Young person

"She has really flourished since attending and has become so much more confident, which has had a knock-on effect across every part of her life."

Supporting professional





85%
of young people said Care to Dance has helped build their confidence.

84%
said they have developed teamwork, communication and problem-solving skills.

90%
of younger children said they feel more confident than before.

HOPE & FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

This is one of the longer-term outcomes we are particularly interested in: not simply what young people experience while they are at Care to Dance, but whether those experiences help them feel more able to take their next steps.

Young people have opportunities to develop skills, take on responsibility and explore new possibilities. For some, Care to Dance has become an important part of their journey towards feeling more confident about what comes next.



76%

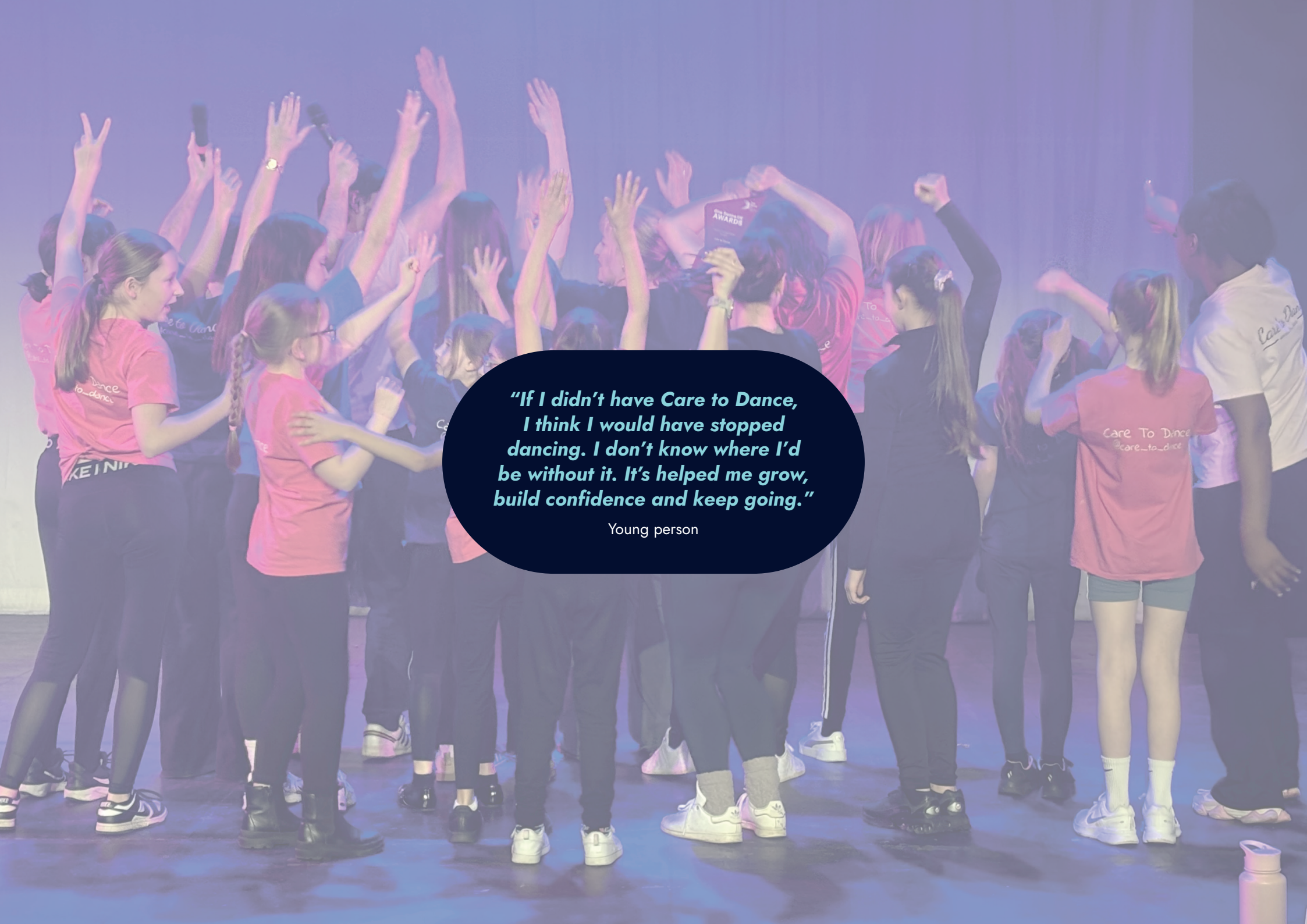
of young people said they feel more hopeful about future opportunities.



78%

of adults reported improvement in belonging, willingness to try new things and hope for the future.





"If I didn't have Care to Dance, I think I would have stopped dancing. I don't know where I'd be without it. It's helped me grow, build confidence and keep going."

Young person

WHAT HAPPENS OVER TIME?

Some of the impact of belonging isn't captured in a single session or a single piece of feedback. Our longitudinal measure is helping us understand what happens when young people remain connected to Care to Dance over a longer period.

The measure looks across seven areas of wellbeing and development, including confidence, emotional wellbeing, connection and belonging, hope for the future and physical wellbeing. It compares young people's scores when they first join Care to Dance with a later point in their journey, typically between six months and three years after joining.

This is early evidence, and we are continuing to build the dataset and repeat the measure every six months. It doesn't tell us that Care to Dance alone caused these changes, but it gives us an encouraging indication of how young people's wellbeing and development can change while they remain connected to our communities.





90%

of young people demonstrated an improvement in their overall wellbeing and development score over time.



92%

of young people maintained or improved their overall wellbeing and development score over time.



1. When a young person joins Care to Dance

- *Gets to know the people and the space.*
- *Joins in at their own pace.*
- *Starts to feel safe and welcomed.*



2. As trust grows

- *Starts to make friends and build trusting relationships.*
- *Feels more comfortable being themselves.*
- *Has somewhere they look forward to going.*



3. As confidence grows

- *Starts to recognise what they can do and feel capable.*
- *Feels able to try new things and share their ideas.*
- *Feels part of a community where they matter.*



4. Later in their journey

Typically 6 months - 3 years after joining

- *Carries a stronger sense of confidence and belonging into everyday life.*
- *Has opportunities to complete Dance Leadership qualifications and become an Ambassador.*
- *May progress into a Dance Teaching Assistant or Mentor role, helping others find their confidence and belonging.*
- *Starts to see new possibilities for their future.*

FROM LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO WIDER INFLUENCE

What we learn through our communities increasingly shapes conversations beyond Care to Dance. Over the past year, we have been recognised as a source of expertise on creating meaningful opportunities for care-experienced young people and invited to contribute to policy, professional practice and the training of people who support young people.

These relationships are continuing to grow, giving us more opportunities to bring young people's experiences, alongside our professional expertise and evidence, into wider conversations.



INFLUENCING SYSTEMS AND POLICY

Care to Dance was recognised as an example of good practice in the Local Government Association's guidance on improving opportunities for physical activity for care-experienced children and young people. We also presented to LGA and Children's Services professionals, sharing our expertise in trauma-informed approaches, relationships and community, and what these can mean for young people's ability to access and benefit from physical activity.

Our expertise also contributed to new guidance through the Midlands Arts Partnership, and to national conversations about the role of the arts for marginalised young people through the Festival of Education and the National Education Union's Arts & Minds campaign.

An invitation to 10 Downing Street gave us another opportunity to bring this perspective into a national conversation about creating more spaces for young people to be physically active and find community. We highlighted an important part of what we have learned through our work: creating a space is only the beginning. The people leading it need the understanding, skills and support to make it somewhere young people genuinely feel safe, included and able to belong.



STRENGTHENING PRACTICE

Our expertise is also reaching practitioners working directly with young people, particularly within the dance sector.

This year, more than 60 dance practitioners took part in trauma-informed CPD delivered through our work with organisations including ISTD, Trinity Laban and the Royal Academy of Dance. We shared practical learning about how trauma-informed approaches can be embedded in the way dance spaces are created, led and experienced, rather than treated simply as an additional piece of knowledge.

Through our partnership with Coram, we have been able to bring our practical experience and professional expertise into wider work around care-experienced young people. Care to Dance was featured as an example of good practice in guidance pulled together by Coram and partners for practitioners and councils, highlighting the importance of trauma-informed community spaces and meaningful progression opportunities.

This recognition provides an important platform to share learning from our communities across the country, helping to inform how support for care-experienced young people can be created and delivered.



BRINGING YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES INTO PROFESSIONAL SPACES

Perhaps most importantly, our communities create opportunities for young people's experiences to influence the adults and professionals around them.

At the Frontline Summer Institute, our ambassadors took part in an intensive training week for more than 500 trainee social workers, performing and sharing a film exploring what helps a social worker be the very best they can be for a young person. Their experiences, ideas and hopes give future social workers a direct insight into what matters to care-experienced young people: relationships, belonging, being listened to and having adults who believe in them.

We also worked with Leicestershire Virtual School to co-create a video with three young people, who shared their experiences of education and offered advice to education professionals on creating safer environments and a stronger sense of belonging. The project grew from a young people's panel, where it became clear that their experiences could help inform the adults working around them.

At Teesside University, we delivered a workshop for student social workers alongside Cicero, a former Care to Dance participant. This created a particularly powerful opportunity for lived experience and professional expertise to come together, helping future social workers think differently about how they seek out spaces of belonging for young people.

We also brought this perspective to the Children's Commissioners Conference, facilitating a workshop on complexity in children's services and the importance of keeping the young person at the centre.

These aren't simply opportunities for young people to perform or tell their stories. They create a direct connection between lived experience and professional learning, helping future professionals understand the importance of relationships, belonging, being listened to and having adults who believe in young people.

We are taking what we learn from young people and our communities into conversations which directly impact them and their life chances, combining lived experience, professional expertise and evidence to help shape better opportunities for care-experienced young people.



Photo by Jake Darling/Become at the APPG for Care Experienced Children and Young People Relationships Inquiry event

LOOKING AHEAD



Our ambition is bigger than reaching more young people. It is to make sure that more care-experienced young people have access to the kind of consistent, supportive community that can help them develop, experience a sense of achievement and feel more hopeful about what is possible for their future.

As we grow, our focus will be on extending that opportunity while protecting what makes Care to Dance work: trusted relationships, consistency, belonging and the quality of the experience young people have when they walk through our doors.

For young people who want to pursue dance, we will continue to create opportunities to develop skills, gain leadership qualifications, become Dance Teaching Assistants, take on ambassador roles and access further training and experience.

These pathways give young people the opportunity to build on what they have developed within their communities and turn it into meaningful experience, responsibility and progression.

But progression does not have to mean pursuing a career in dance. The wider value of these experiences is in helping young people develop the confidence, skills, relationships and sense of possibility that can support them in whatever they choose to do next. Our Theory of Change recognises that, over time, young people can become more open to new opportunities, more committed to their personal development and more likely to take steps towards education or employment.

We are particularly interested in what this can mean for young people's longer-term aspirations and engagement with life. We can already see encouraging evidence that young people feel more hopeful, more confident and more willing to try new things after our programmes - important foundations for being able to recognise and pursue opportunities when they arise.

Over time, we want to understand more about how these changes relate to young people's engagement with education, employment and wider opportunities as they move through their lives.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next phase will therefore be about depth as well as reach: continuing to strengthen existing communities, developing meaningful progression opportunities, and building the evidence that helps us understand what changes when young people remain connected to those communities over time.

We will continue to repeat our longitudinal measure, learn from young people and the adults around them, and use that learning to keep improving our practice.

Partnership will remain central to this. We will continue to deepen our relationships with local authorities, Virtual Schools and other organisations, while sharing our learning more widely and contributing to conversations about how care-experienced young people can access opportunities that enable them to belong, develop and thrive.

Ultimately, we want more care-experienced young people, wherever they live, to have the opportunity to find a Care to Dance community, where they can gain a greater sense of who they are, what they can do and what might be possible for their future.



THANK YOU

Care to Dance is made possible by the people and organisations who believe in what is possible for care-experienced young people.

To every young person who has been part of our communities this year: thank you. You bring the energy, creativity, humour and care that make Care to Dance what it is. We are proud to see you grow, celebrate each other and make these communities your own.

To our funders, local authority and Virtual School partners, delivery partners, supporters and everyone who has shared our belief in the importance of community, creativity and belonging: thank you for making this work possible.

Your support gives young people the opportunity to build relationships, discover what they can do, experience achievement and imagine what might be possible next.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who has been part of the Care to Dance journey this year, and excited for what comes next.

Thank you for being part of it.



OUR PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

CARE TO DANCE

We so grateful to all those who have supported us on our journey so far - our work has been possible because of you.

The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
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The Bernard Piggott Charitable Trust
CHALK CLIFF TRUST
CARE LEAVER COVENANT
THE CJW FUND
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