



# "Explore"

## Creative & Expressive Dance Project

### Reducing isolation and loneliness

Amanda Hose-Hawley

Amanda is a participatory Dance Leader based in Nottingham - A passionate advocate of promoting inclusion and accessibility through creative and collaborative delivery methods and improvisation.

Amanda has a niche skillset having practised as a Social Care specialist in Criminal Justice as a rehabilitation Counsellor with high risk and vulnerable, disadvantaged individuals combined with 20 years of freelance dance delivery.

Graduating from Trinity Laban in 2022 with Honours demonstrates her continued commitment to her own development and the quality of experience for participants of dance. Her ambition is to be integral in the provision of healthier creative communities.

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[#ExploreDanceProjectNottingham](https://www.instagram.com/ExploreDanceProjectNottingham) 



LOTTERY FUNDED

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**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

“Explore” is an accessible, creative dance initiative devised for disadvantaged or vulnerable adults accessing services in Nottingham City’s deprived areas experiencing increased loneliness or isolation due to Covid.

Engaging people not normally accessing dance as Art, develop their expressive and problem-solving skills through movement and improvisation. Connect to other cultures whilst experiencing new activities and enjoying dance as part of a supportive learning community.



“Explore” consists of three components - development, delivery and evaluation

- Creative and informal evaluation methods to shape and develop sessions
- Person-centred practise delivering new creative dance opportunities
- Providing safe dance space for improvisation, inclusivity and escapism
- Building a network and evolving collaborative partnerships

# Summary

The intended target audience were successfully engaged in regular sessions. Other vulnerable adults were accessed via "roadshow" sessions, quantitative and qualitative data were collected from centre attendees.

- Participants ranged from 25 to 85 years of age
- 85% had not previously accessed dance or art projects
- Dancers represented ten countries and eleven ethnic origins
- Identified as six genders and eight sexual orientations
- Predominantly residing in NG2, 3 and 7 areas of the Nottingham
- 40% identified as having a disability
- Over 63% experience loneliness and or 53% isolation (see appendix)
- Regular experiences included 63% anxiety and 68% stress

*"I went in with frustrations, mostly linked to recent bad experiences in other sporting clubs, and past experiences in social clubs as a child. The class has helped me let go of that and let loose both emotionally and physically while also aiding my other sporting activities!"*

## Outcome

- 90% Increased confidence in communication and expressive skills
- 80% Built new relationships reducing loneliness and isolation
- 90% Integrated into a supportive and healthy community
- 90% Improved emotional wellbeing, social activity and interaction
- 90% Benefited from physical activity
- 100% Enjoyed dancing as an individual and the group movement
- 100% Engaged in creative and expressive dance
- 100% Made local connections in a safe environment
- 100% Enjoyed being part of "Explore" (see appendix)

*"Bless, I learned nice dance movements and more confidence and experience communicating with others. It has got me out and about more to associate with all kinds of different people. It has given me more patience in listening and being taught by other people, both the teacher and the group that I dance with. It has put a smile back on my face, and it brings me out of myself."*

# The Project

The inclusive six-week participatory dance project focused on group movement to improve health wellbeing, encouraged creativity, expression, cultural appreciation, celebrated diversity and counteracted the destructive individualism caused by loneliness and isolation. Delivered weekly to four groups, "Explore" made expressive dance accessible, enabled escapism, exploration and provided individuals with new experiences that improved feelings of self-worth and offered new life experiences. Included social activities to unite the group and informally gather their evaluative contributions

**DESIGNED:** Person-centred, inclusive and accessible participatory dance sessions. There was a world habitat theme throughout using instrumental world music and relevant sounds from nature; no lyrics were used to avoid trigger words in any language. During the Polar habitat session, classical music written to increase awareness of global warming was used, followed by participants reflecting on how this made them feel.

**SELECTED:** Collaborative and inclusion delivery styles in the preparation and sessions plans focused on the enjoyment of the process and improvisation, with social and artistic aims and informal measurable outcomes of the experience and environment.

**PREPARED:** Differentiation by the pace, activity, outcome and dialogue tailored to individual abilities, engaged and motivated participants in each task, making activities achievable regardless of experience - This integrated approach without assumption of ability enabled everyone to take part, celebrating individuality from dancers using walking aids to our oldest seated dancer as a unified group.

**ENSURED:** Accessibility by identifying appropriate familiar language to use consistently. Displayed symbols and words, used imagery and analogy, demonstrated and discussed movement qualities to meet all learning styles and develop familiarity. Encouraged the quality and dynamics of movement using the Laban method. Combined with regular reflection and sharing of thoughts, feelings and interpretations, more was achieved than they imagined possible - "I can not believe I'm dancing"

**SETTING:** Freedom and space to explore the inclusive programme with equality and collaboration. Praised appropriately, encouraged to be playful, creative and dance for pleasure without the constriction of assessment or criticism, purely enjoyment of the process and individual expression and interpretation of tasks.

**PROVIDED:** Safe space to escape reality for the vulnerable and excluded. The artistic and social focus appeared to have therapeutic benefits; the photographer observed and captured joyful expressions. Laughter often filled the space, and the atmosphere felt positive; this combination resulted in social cohesion and wellbeing.

**BUILT:** Confidence throughout the project, initially leading the sessions, provided minimal structure surrounded by the freedom to grow, guided and facilitated whilst encouraging supportive peer Mentor relationships that naturally developed. Sessions culminated in peer lead tasks, progressing to a peer lead session, where I observed relationships skills and dynamics in the Rain Forest session demonstrated group progression.

**ESTABLISHED:** Dialogical pedagogy from the outset, listening to opinions, providing a safe space to share their experience of the delivery and content. Listening to thoughts and feelings happening. Valuing all contributions and responding by adapting content, which moulded and evolved "Explore" such as getting the balance right between structured and freedom to be expressive, for greater enjoyment.

**RECOGNISED:** Achievement and progression: participants were given black and white photographs, discussed what their peers had observed in others, providing a new and often more positive perspective, which built self-confidence. I and the Chaperone wrote cards thanking each individual for their valuable input, identifying strengths, social and creative growth, and importance in the group.

# Participant Impact

Measured throughout the project via informal, anonymous and creative data collection methods such as project logs, emoji boards, evaluation forms and photographs. Quantitative data can be found in the appendix - A sample of qualitative data evidencing the participants' experience in their own words

**FRIENDSHIP:** Participants discuss meeting socially signposting each other to support services. Reporting "Social connections with some lovely people I would never have met up with usually" project log

**THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS:** Recorded throughout the project log, with frequent reference to feeling relaxed, calm, energised and invigorated. "Very calming - helped me let go of my self-consciousness." "Soothing, expressive, stupendous." "Absolutely wonderful, so relaxing & supportive."

**ENJOYMENT:** Measured using emoji boards, effective with ESOL participants. During the discussion about the expressions of joy and happiness captured by the photographer, "I can't stop smiling, I am so excited to be happy for a whole hour". A survivor of modern slavery pointed at his heart and repeatedly said, "Happy".

**HEALTH & WELLBEING:** Reported feeling more energised and focused daily. Improvement in balance and mood was observed and recorded in feedback. "I've built in confidence with my body image, mental health and my flexibility". "Improved my balance, felt more relaxed generally and part of a friendly group".

**CREATIVITY & EXPRESSION:** Response to the habitat themes have been enthusiastic, engaging fully with the imagery and analogy used in the delivery, at times playful, often excited atmosphere. "I've enjoyed every second so far and really needed this creative outlet." Very good, expressive, creative and enjoyed."

**ESCAPISM:** Embracing the concept of taking inspiration from nature for movement and wholeheartedly using imagination and improvisation from session one. "Being lava was a wonderful and ever-changing experience from quick flowing to solidifying- Just marvellous" "C your portrayal of the Turtles characteristics were mesmerising."

**GROUP WORK:** Introduced with consent for contact discussed, leadership, support and tolerance were practised, each group responded to tasks together, without any reservation. "I loved working altogether and moving beautifully in sync" Emoji boards recorded everyone enjoying working in pairs and groups. "L was a wonderful counterbalance partner - I felt very safe and much closer emotionally."

**INCLUSIVITY:** A multi-faceted approach to delivery, where learning styles were met through diagrams, words, discussion and demonstrations V.A.R.K. Using laban method of using familiar language/symbols to describe the movement included every participant at their own pace and level of ability and experience, evidenced by the retention. "Fun and relaxing atmosphere with zero pressure" "I feel more part of life. I've landed. Wonderful" Participants have integrated into universal dance workshops as they feel safe, welcome, and accepted in the space due to attending Explore.

**FEELING VALUED:** Graffiti boards to leave compliments and a dialogical pedagogy inclusive of appropriate praise and support encouraged peer appreciation of artistic and social development. "N, you were an amazing Owl... Love your creativity" "P impressed me with their quirky and so creative moves! real dancer" Being heard through their feedback and discussions and seeing how their opinion shaped the project and bringing an idea to life in 3D technicolour and making it not only a reality but a success

"It was a wonderful and restorative experience that I didn't expect. It hugely enhanced well being."

"Its been absolutely beautiful and moving and I have enjoyed every second, wonderful people and sessions"

"I loved doing it, and felt that I gained in confidence and expressivity over the time"

loved the freeness of today and loved being in flow - it's one of my favourite moves!

Enjoyed losing myself in dance - going into the zone

I love the therapeutic after effects of this dance group.

I loved working all together and moving beautifully in sync

Lizzie impressed me with her flowing dance movements!

Peri impressed me with her quirky + so creative moves! Real dancer.

I feel energised, so well, so fit now: 10 years younger

Fun + energising!  
Thank you 😊

Kim impressed me with her leadership style of dance!

SO MUCH FUN!! Thanks and great to work w/ a partner.

PACE	CONTENT	Enjoy	SPEED
😊	😊	😊	😊
😊	😄	😊	😊
😊	😊	😊	😊
😊	😊	😊	😊

built in confidence with my body image and mental health and my flexibility

# Project Partners

I worked well with new people, cultivated relationships, reaching new audiences. Used respectful approaches building trust and rapport to gain insight from beneficiaries and specialists to sculpt "Explore" and grow my network, making this project a success and the rollout of "Freedom to Explore" participatory art project to emerging communities.

**REFERRING AGENCIES:** The original partners Nottingham Women's Centre, Salvation Army - Adult Survivors of Modern Slavery Unit, Notts LGBTQ+ Network and The Jericho Road Project - Joined by Improving lives Nottingham, Turning Point, NHS Social Prescribers, Notts Trans Hub and Refugee Roots whom I look forward to continuing working closely with in addition to multiple agencies who have expressed interest.

**ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND:** National Lottery Grants Award made "Explore" possible with additional donations from the Nottingham dance community.

**MENTOR:** Diane Amans is one of the leading practitioners in community dance, a dance artist, lecturer and consultant whose career has included managing dance projects in diverse community settings and training staff in arts, health and social care

**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Emma Ford has captured the undiluted joy. Her documentary style and discretion made her invisible; her empathic and approachable nature was perfect.

**CHAPERONES:** Josephine Harris and Keisha Harriette were invaluable to the project's success, supporting myself and the participants' with consideration and kindness.

## What Comes Next?

- Continue my commitment to understanding inclusivity and accessibility in participatory dance through "Freedom to Explore" and secure additional grant awards to make this opportunity sustainable for the community.
- Nurture new collaborative relationships with Creatives and Support Agencies to diversify the group population. Expand to new and emerging communities through connections with Primary Care, Refugee services and Community groups. Target isolated adults experiencing social anxiety, stress, PTSD, depression and isolation via NHS Social Prescribing, Wellbeing Coaches and Mental Health Services.
- Take guidance from a panel of "Explore" beneficiaries. Further, develop delivery and retention methods and strategies based on a new understanding of the needs of different groups in this dance context. Protect the safe environment for the groups to escape to and explore their imagination and creativity in comfort.
- Maximise on the creative opportunity and experience "Explore" enabled by providing support in kind groups as a continued professional and creative development opportunity, furthering the effective, innovative evaluation methods to inform future planning and funding opportunities. Design accessible, participatory dance and art experiences to offer escapism, exploration and enjoyment to secure my future in participatory arts.
- Deliver to marginalised adults from new and emerging communities, secure connections with deprived area residents to improve well-being and health by partnering with criminal justice and housing associations. Take "Freedom to Explore" into residential homes, social care and custodial settings and contribute to healthier creative communities.

# Observations & Experiences

## Photography by Emma Ford

"Naturally, it's a proven fact that moving your body is not only good for the body but incredibly important for the mind and a person's mental health. When Amanda approached me to photograph some of her 'Explore' dance sessions, I was really excited and honoured that she would choose me to not only experience the sessions but that the class as a whole would be open to having me capture their vulnerability as I documented their personal journeys and discovery in the joy of movement and dance.

I attended the first session and was immediately overwhelmed by the connection Amanda had with her dancers. I've been involved in many community projects, but there was something about 'Explore' that felt special and incredibly different to anything else I've experienced. Photographing the movement of the dancers around the studio, witnessing the freedom and release they felt was very emotional, perhaps almost spiritual.

The benefits of this project are plentiful both mentally and physically, especially in today's society.

I feel so lucky to have been able to play a small part in publicising this incredibly moving and inspiring project and I can only hope that Amanda receives the support she needs to continue to offer 'Explore' to a wider number of aspiring dancers. "

Emma Ford



"I found that the dance allowed me to have a platform that I could channel into and zone out all the intrusive thoughts of the day whilst being able to socially be a part of something, have an experience with others that wasn't so heavy but still feeling that social connection and being able to communicate in a way that doesn't require words, sometimes verbal communication can be difficult- dance takes that away

It felt like a safe place, a place free of judgement and inclusive to 'explore'

There was no stress in having to be a certain way or act a certain way and that is a daily challenge for me, as a result of PTSD and not feeling like I fit into a 'normal' setting"

L - Women's group





# Observations & Experiences



Explore offers a unique opportunity within Nottingham for people who might not usually access dance spaces to explore dance and creative movement to music in an encouraging and safe environment. The emphasis is on expression through dance and the class is wonderfully led by Amanda via the Laban method which uses familiar everyday language to describe the movements. With the focus on process rather than end result, everyone feels included and able to use their body and movements expressively.

This holistic approach to wellbeing - where each class starts and ends with a cuppa and a chat - gets to the very heart of why we dance: to build community and connection. The difference in people participating is huge: they have something new they look forward to doing, a huge sense of achievement, and familiar faces to do it with who quickly become friends. Having tried the taster session myself, I can vouch for the warm, supportive atmosphere - when the music starts you can't help but smile!

Georgia Powell Social Prescriber NHS



"Improved physical agility, stamina, strength, mental relaxation, also cognitive encouragement and opportunity freedom to expressively dance.

The impact on a reclusive participant unable to venture out, even to catch a bus to a contented smiling, creative, expressive, relaxed, empowered individual able to socialise with confidence.

The elderly participants danced which promoted escape from isolation and activity to promote increased mobility

Social and supportive"

Y - Mixed/Female Group

" The dance sessions have helped in many aspects of my life. One thing that I have noticed is the fitness benefit with using all-around muscles. The creative element is fantastic and imaginative and because we are using creation to express our dance, it always feels like an emotional connection, and I would say very good for mood-building with music and action"

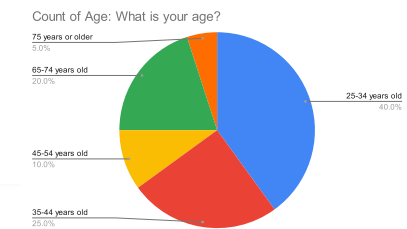
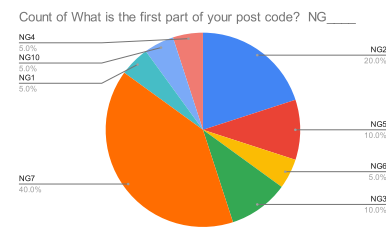
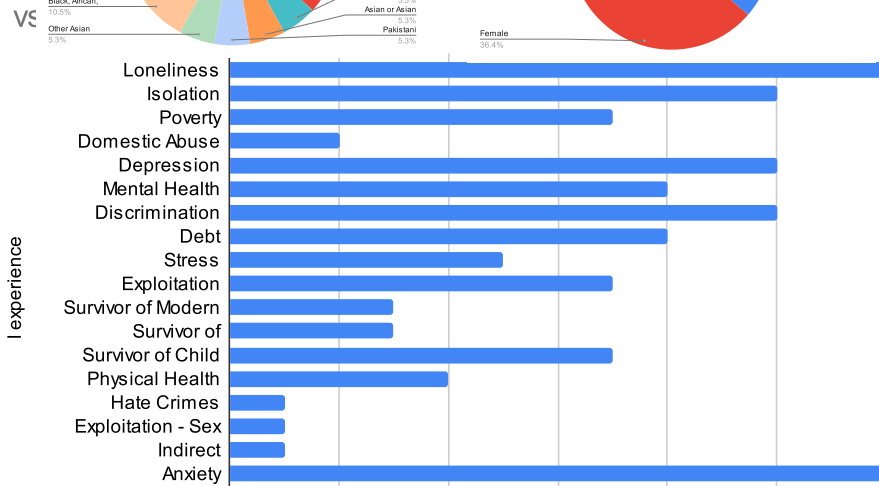
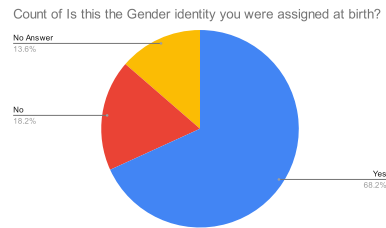
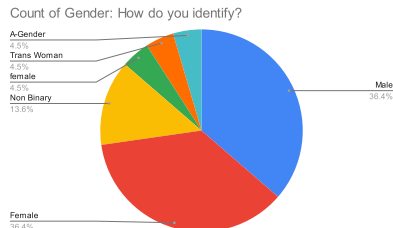
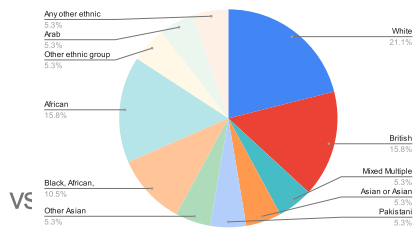
N - Mixed Group

# Appendix

## Quantative Data

### Initial Data Capture

Initial Capture - Further information available	YES	NO	Working Towards	Some
Dance: Do you regularly access creative dance Projects?	0	85%		15%
Arts Council: Do you regularly access Art Projects	5%	80%		15%
Disability: Do you consider yourself to have a disability?	40%	60%		
Is English your first language?	60%	40%		

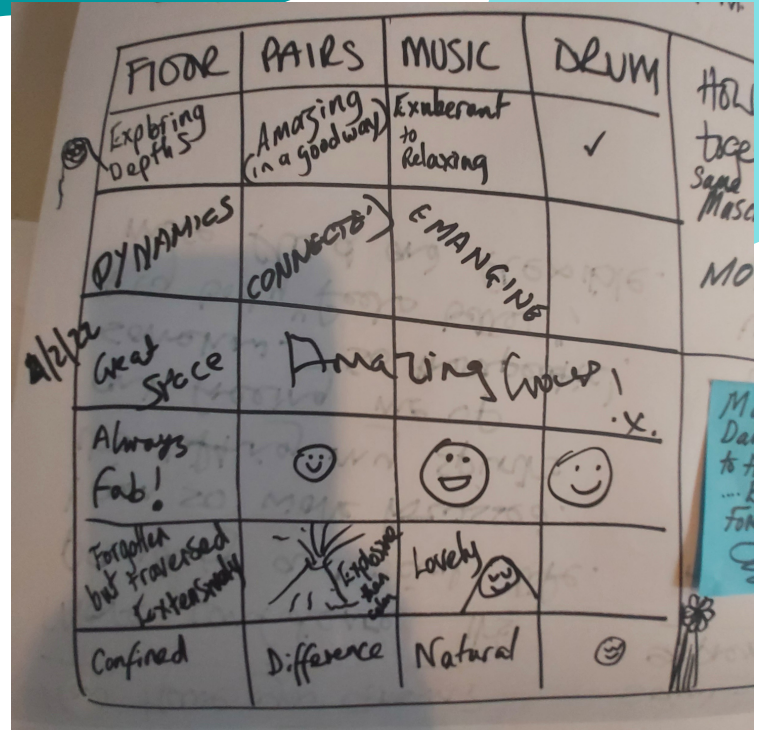
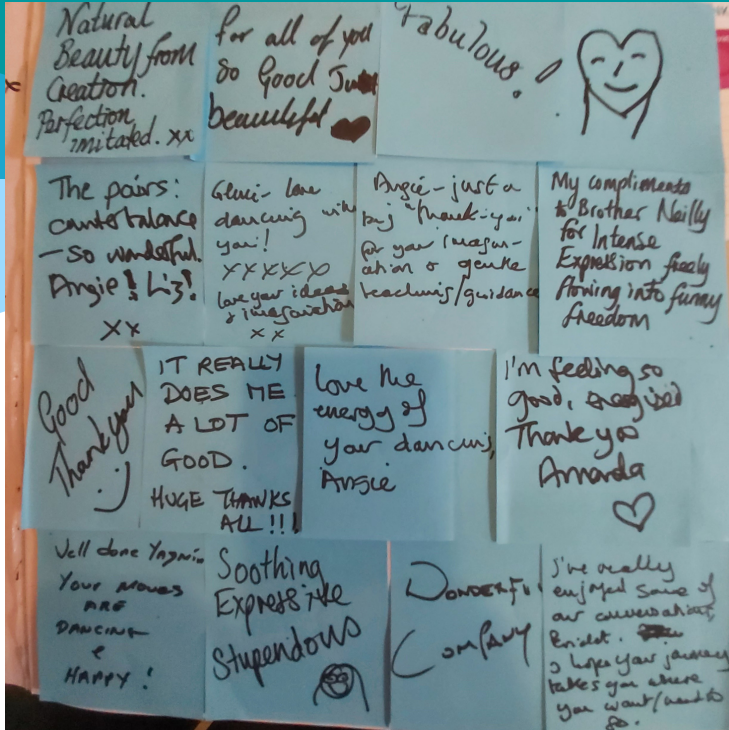


### Exit Data

Exit Evaluation				
Have you increased confidence in communication and expressive skills ?	90%	10%	0	0
Have you built relationships to reduce loneliness and isolation?	70%	20%	10%	0
Have you integrated into a supportive healthy community?	90%	0	0	10%
Have you improved emotional wellbeing, social activity and interaction?	90%	10%	0	0
Have you benefited from physical activity?	90%	0	0	10
Have you enjoyed dancing as an individual and group movement?	100%	0	0	0
Have you engaged in creative and expressive dance?	100%	0	0	0
Have you made local connections in a safe environment?	100%	0	0	0
Have you enjoyed being part of Explore?	100%	0	0	0
Did the Facilitator meet your expectations?	100%	0	0	0
Did the Programme meet your expectations?	90%	0	10%	0
Did the venue meet your expectations?	90%	0	10%	0
Would you recommend Explore to a friend?	90%	10%	0	0
Would you take part in another Explore Adventure?	80%			20% maybe
Please tell me about your Explore experience Notes in B26				
How can I make the experience better next time? Notes B27				

# Appendix

## Project log, Graffiti wall & Emoji feedback



More confidence. It's providing a social life. I am so work stressed. It's lifting my spirits and freeing me up somehow. So therapeutic! My body "feels better", more fluid and flexible.

So good to be dancing again - finding something which is expressive dance - and is delivered at a level which I can participate in.

Reminding myself of who I am, & what I'm capable of. Body loosening exercises - even if only temporarily. Have loved seeing other people's expressions - I've noticed Peridot particularly. And making some new social connections, maybe?!

Been Very therapeutic and loved every moment!

I'm easily overwhelmed by several instructions + this happened at times!

Fand some things a bit restrictive - wanted to not have to use the ribbons at times or back of the planes - just do my own thing

Absolutely Wonderful! So relaxing and so Supportive! ♥

A novel experience that made me exercise my brain! Helped me overcome my general frustration. Still need to work through my self consciousness 😊 Fun + relaxing atmosphere with zero pressure - just what I needed!

Fun too Disinfecting



## Thank you to:

NHS Primary care, Social Prescribers & Wellbeing coaches, Alan Hose, Refugee Roots, Salvation Army, Nottingham Women's Centre, Community Cohesion Officers, Local Community Centres & Social Care Services, NCVS, The Renewal Trust, Rusty Monkeys, Des Gibbons, Damian Carnell, Jericho Road Project, Notts Trans Hub, Dance4, Survivor Alliance, Refugee Forum, The Left Lion, BBC Radio Nottingham, VAPN, Notts LGBTQ+ Network, Notts County Foundation, Yasmin Khan, Beth Hanna Neighbourhood Development Officer St Anns, Survivor Support Service, Josephine Harris, Keisha Harriette, Emma Ford, Georgia Powell

## for sharing, advice & support

Do you support individuals who could benefit from dancing?  
Are you interested in partnering with "Explore" on future adventures?

Please contact Amanda on 07725325707

*"It's been absolutely beautiful and moving and I have enjoyed every second, wonderful people and sessions"*