

*Improving Social Inclusion for Canadians with  
Dementia and Carers through Sharing Dance*



**Peterborough Pilot  
Phase Three Report:  
Process and Outcomes**

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Cover photo: NBS Baycrest Sharing Dance program is set up with staggered in the institutional setting at Revera Retirement Residence, William Place in Lindsay, Ontario.

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# 1. Introduction

A growing body of research suggests that arts-based programs such as music, dance, and painting can improve the lives of older people. Much of this research has focused on measuring the outcomes of arts-based programs in terms of preventing falls and improving balance, mood, cognition (Coubard et al., 2011) and physical functioning (Abreu et al., 2013; Alpert et al., 2009; Blankevoort et al., 2010). Much less is known about how these programs might improve social inclusion for older adults. In this internal research report, we begin by discussing how we have conceptualized and examined the use of an arts-based program, Baycrest NBS *Sharing Dance Seniors*, to improve social inclusion for older adults and we then highlight best practices, challenges, recommendations, and next steps in research and program development.

## 1.1 Understanding social inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the ability of a group to fully participate in relationships and activities. Older adults can face a range of barriers to full and meaningful participation in their communities. For example, local factors such as social relations, access to services, financial resources, transportation and mobility, and safety and security as well as broader influences such as economic forces, community development, and individual life-course trajectories influence older adults' opportunities to participate (Walsh et al., 2012). The concept of social inclusion recognizes that participation is not just an individual choice; people and organizations shape programs, practices, policies, and attitudes to more fully include those who experience exclusion (Funk, 2015). We need to know more about what types of programs can enhance the social inclusion and well-being of older adults.

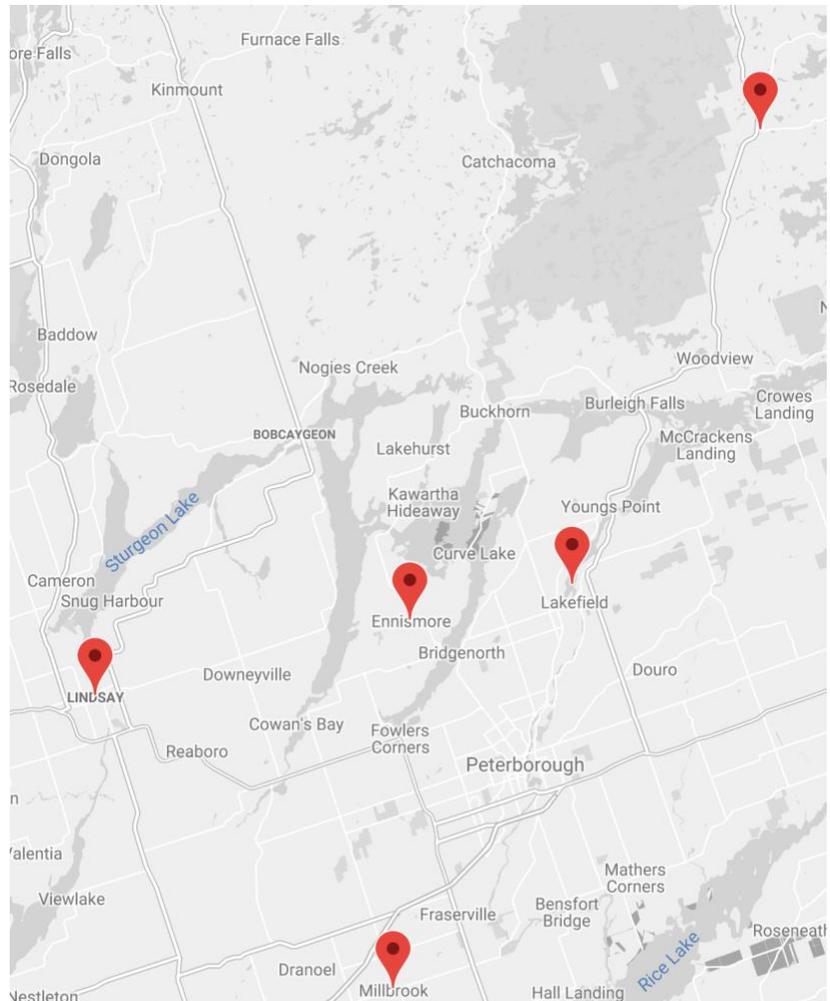
The purpose of the project is to examine the potential of an innovative dance program, Baycrest NBS *Sharing Dance Seniors*, to improve the social inclusion of older adults. The program was developed as a joint venture between Baycrest Health Sciences and Canada's National Ballet School (NBS). The research was based out of Trent University in collaboration with Brandon University, University of Manitoba, and University of Toronto. The research team used multiple methods to examine the experiences of older adults participating in the program as well as assess the effectiveness of delivering the program through a streamed group model, and the challenges of expanding and sustaining the program.

## 1.2 Overview of Peterborough Pilot Study (Phase Three)

The Peterborough pilot study is part of a four year study “Improving social inclusion for people with dementia and carers through sharing dance”, involving research at study sites in Brandon and the Westman region as well as in the Peterborough Region in Ontario (see Figure 1) in four phases (Skinner et al, 2018).

Each study site involves a dress rehearsal at a single community site, a community expansion phase, and an institutional phase. In April 2017, Trent University, NBS, and Community Care worked collaboratively to test the first streamed group session of the Baycrest NBS Sharing Dance Seniors program for active seniors over eight weeks (P1). The “dress rehearsal” took place at the Chemung office in Ennismore, Ontario. A project planning meeting was held at Trent University in July 2017 to discuss the outcomes of the dress rehearsal and plan the expansion of the program (P2) in September 2017 (see Kosurko et al., 2017).

Branch offices in Apsley, Ennismore, Havelock, Lakefield and Millbrook participated in the community care expansion, which took place from September to November for one hour every Wednesday morning. From March to May, 2018. P3 was implemented at branch offices in Apsley, Ennismore, Lakefield, and Millbrook, with the expansion to one institutional setting at William Place Retirement Residence in Lindsay (see Figure 2.) Table one outlines the timeline for the Peterborough project expansion as well as subsequent research exploring the experiences of older people with dementia and carers in Brandon, Manitoba. The phases are unified by a consistent method of data collection and program evaluation.



**Figure 1: Peterborough Pilot Phase Three in five locations (Source: Google maps)**



## 1.3 Method of evaluation

This report is a summary of the data collected in phase three of the Peterborough Pilot. Each phase of data collection involves four sources of information: observations, diaries, focus groups, and interviews, (Skinner et al., 2018). The Peterborough pilot also involved a balance test. The primary sources of information for this report are weekly observations made at each of the program sites by a research assistant, weekly diaries kept by participants, and focus groups with participants and facilitators. In total, 32 observations were analyzed, 35 diary entries were collected from 7 participants, 20 interviews and four focus groups were conducted (see Table 2). The observations included weekly descriptive notes about the physical setting, participants' actions and interactions, the sequence of activities and responses to the dance instructors on screen, and communication between the onsite facilitator and participants. The diaries included participant descriptions of what happened in the dance program each week as well as participant evaluations of the best part of the program, any challenges the participants encountered, how they felt during the program, and anything else the participants felt was important to record that week. Focus groups were conducted in all five study sites. The focus groups were used to develop consensus about what participants and facilitators liked best, what they liked least, what they saw as the most challenging part of the program, how the mode of delivery influenced the program's success, and what possible changes might be made to the program. The project also included follow-up interviews with participants to explore their individual evaluations of the program.

**Table 2: Summary of data collected at each site**

	Apsley	Chemung	Lindsay	Lakefield	Millbrook
Balance Assessments <sup>1</sup>					
Observations	4	6	7	8	7
Diaries <sup>2</sup>	2	0	1	3	1
Focus Groups	0	1	1	1	1
Interviews	1	5	4	5	5

<sup>1</sup>These data are not presented in this report

<sup>2</sup>These numbers refer to the number of diaries collected, not the number of entries.

The subsequent sections of this report provide a preliminary overview of what participants liked best, what they disliked, and what improvements can be made to future iterations of the Baycrest NBS Sharing Dance Seniors program.

## 2. Processes and Outcomes

### 2.1 Connecting through group movement and music

A majority of participants indicated the strongest aspect of the program was being part of a group “getting out and moving with other people,” using words like “companionship”, “community” and “camaraderie” to describe what they liked best. One participant explained that her enjoyment of the movement was inseparable from her feeling of “connectedness” with the group: “If I was just doing the physical alone it would be like doing my physio, but it has none of the added benefits of working towards a dance with a group of people.”

***“A room full of people makes you enjoy it more because it’s different than when you’re doing it on your own. Other people will know that I haven’t done it, so it’s motivating for me.”***



***Figure 2 Dance program in session, seniors in port de bras warm-up at Revera Retirement Residence, William Place in Lindsay, Ontario***

One participant described a “camaraderie in aching,” with other participants, as a result of participating in the program together. This was observed in conversations in session:

- 1: I don’t know, but I can feel it.
- 2: My arms are tired.
- 1: It’s good.
- 3: It’s the flames [from the arm choreography] that get me!

Participants talked about moments of shared laughter, observed regularly during sessions when they pointed at each other or pretended to eat marshmallows, or when sequences were sped up and steps were missed. Participants acknowledged these moments in discussion during focus groups: “The comedy comes out of us, eh?” (all laugh); “We learned that it’s good to laugh at ourselves.”

## 2.1 Connecting through group movement and music cont'd

All participants were very fond of the musical aspect of the program and the live accompanist. They looked forward to, "the music and the chance to move to it" and said that "being able to move to the music is just a different experience." One participant articulated what it meant to her to share history and culture with the group through music: "The biggest impact was when everybody got singing together. I grew up singing those songs. Very emotional, got me to my heart."

As noted in observations, "overall there was progress with the level of participation in the movements and the interaction with each other. There were moments when all participants were doing all movements in sync with each other."

## 2.2 Repetition of dances and in instruction

Repetition was a key theme in both the use of the same dances each week and in the instruction of steps within the dances. With participants' varying levels of ability and interest, there were mixed views on the repetitiveness. Some disliked doing the same dances every week as expressed with the comment "here we go again," while others enjoyed having their favourite dance sequences repeated each week. Some participants liked the repetition of instruction in the steps, but others thought there could be a bit less: "the repetition was good, but maybe not quite so long," ... "we ended up doing dry runs twice, so skip one of them, let's do it all together without the music, then let's do the music – especially after two or three weeks, you understand what they want you to be doing with your feet." However, there was sensitivity to the varying levels of ability of other participants: "I think the number of times of repetition depends on the venue of where you are and who you end up with."

One facilitator commented on these differences regarding repetition and variety noting that participants looked forward to certain dances being repeated each week, but that at the same time "it's good to have variety, so adding in one or two new dances is a good idea." The variety was endorsed by some participants; for

example one wrote in her diary that she suffers from Parkinsons and that she enjoyed when, "each week we learned something new."



**Figure 3: Seniors reach forwards in a stretch together in Millbrook, Ontario**

## 2.3 Informed movement and being in ballet

Participants expressed enjoyment in being a part of a prestigious activity like ballet: "I always wanted to take ballet." One participant expressed pleasure in her interaction with her granddaughter who does ballet. Another described how, "it's really an honour to be with those folks that you're watching on the screen," a sentiment echoed by a facilitator who noted of the group that "there's some pride in the prestige of the NBS."

Many participants indicated an appreciation for the "grace" in ballet and for "how much strength it takes to do things slowly." In conversation and in focus groups, they expressed a desire for more use of ballet terminology - "the barre and the plie" or "a tendu," and for instruction that provides direction on how to do the movements, specifically "how much strength to put into that" to achieve results or for "looking more graceful." A participant felt strongly that "people need to be told how to move - that it needs to come from the shoulder for example - the effect is very different."

## 2.4 Inclusive instruction for diverse abilities

Participants had concerns about their capabilities to participate in physical and cognitive terms. "Well I would wonder at my stamina and wonder the processing speed when I'm 80 compared to when I was 50 in terms of keeping up with the steps - when they get to the left hand I'm still working on my right hand."

While some active seniors felt "it could still be more challenging," many participants appreciated "that people are allowed to work at their ability and are encouraged to do what they can, how they can." Instructors, in tandem with facilitators created a "do what you can," culture in the class environment by explicitly instructing participants to do movements at their own level of ability, with constant reminders. This allowed one participant to continue to attend classes, knowing that she couldn't do much due to her state of health at the time: "I knew I could go and do as little as I was able and not feel badly."



**Figure 4: Ennismore seniors "peddle bicycles up a hill" in a narrative sequence**

## 2.5 Supportive Facilitation

Participants commented about how facilitators enhanced their experience of the class by providing welcome, encouragement, clarity on instructions, and enthusiasm in participating as a “secondary instructor.” Observations noted that engaged facilitators enhanced participant experiences by watching each participant to ensure that the choreography was understood and provided reminders to do what they can, along with encouragement and praise. “Not being judged” was an important aspect of participating and feeling that one could participate at their own level of ability. As one participant noted “I thought [she] was very welcoming and friendly, encouraging without being pushy or judgmental.” According to participants, facilitators enhanced social inclusion because their “engagement in the class exercises makes all the rest of the participants involvement less intimidating ... part of the gang.”

Participants appreciated being reassured about what they were able to do or not do. For example one participant commented “it was the way she explained the movements and stressed that there would be a second option. Her way of explaining was: do whatever you can do at your comfort level.” Participants also expressed gratitude for a knowledgeable facilitator who could provide additional tips: “She gave us quite a few pointers or said, ‘don’t get yourself down about it, everybody is the same in that scope,’ so you accept it and get on with it.”

Facilitators described some of the actions that they took as leading (singing or applause), encouraging conversation, correcting posture, “keeping the joy going,” “making moves bigger at the front,” pausing the video when necessary to clarify, and in one case, “checking in with people to make sure everything was ok. This was a soft skill I used to encourage them to come back.” One facilitator further described how important it was to “keep the engagement because if things get off track we can keep people involved.”

## 2.6 Confidence development

Participants claimed that their balance increased over the course of the eight weeks, but as one facilitator explained, “I watch everyone else and I can see over the course of this particular time frame an increase in confidence, and probably an increase in balance, but that might be more related to confidence as people get more familiar with the steps ...”

Participants similarly expressed that they experienced an increase in confidence both physically and socially. Improved balance was related to loss of fear of falling. As one participant noted “at home I don’t fear falling any more all the time.” Another participant described an incident when she missed a step on the staircase and amazed herself that she handled it: “I couldn’t believe it ... I just did it like I

was dancing." Another explained how, *"it changed [her] ability to stand and not fall, move more smoothly, and without fear of falling which is huge - and then in attitude, the fact that I don't stress about falling."*

One participant attested to being "more open to being physically active. During the program, I bought a gym membership with the intention of walking on the treadmill. And that's where the sense of confidence came in." Another participant surprised herself that she could dance, attesting to the slow building of steps:

"I thought oh my I shouldn't be here, I'm not fit enough and I have to watch my feet. It really developed my confidence in terms of moving in space. The steps built slowly enough. I couldn't believe I could do it! It was gentle enough and rhythmic enough. I was scared to ... wow look at me I can dance!"

### ***Social interaction and level of participation***

Participants noted their increase in interactions with people, which they attributed to an increase in confidence: "Well now I talk to more people and that's a big change." In observations, increased participation in the institutional setting was evident after the first month of the program. On April 5<sup>th</sup> it was noted, "people were skeptical in general at the beginning - all congregating at the comfy chairs along the side of the room to 'just watch' but by May 3<sup>rd</sup>, "not one person was sitting in a cushy chair for the start of class."

## **2.7 Creative expression and exchange**

Participants indicated that they enjoyed the "creative dance" aspects of the program such as "the expression to music through your body;" one described these aspects as making them "smile inside and out."

In diary entries, participants described moments that the music prompted their imagination and memories of times they spent with others dancing or with family. One participant described experiencing a return to her homeland: "I felt great as I imagined myself in the Alps to the tune of The Edelweiss, or wearing a national costume for the Polish mazurka. It reminded me of my childhood experiences of folklore dancing in my homeland and how wonderful it felt!" Another participant said that she, "liked the Johnny Cash - the logs and putting them in the fire - made me think back to my camping days with my family."

Together participants experienced creative exchange through shared movement and conversation during sequences that involved pretending, improvising, visualization and imagination.

Observations noted interactive verbal exchanges between participants during improvised sequences such as questioning each other, "What's that?" or "What kind of spring cleaning do you do?" Participants joined in with one another with individual flourishes that enhanced group participation. They added oral sound effects of waves during the surfing in Hawaii sequence, or improvised mosquito attacks with comments to each other such as, "it's more like this," accompanied by waving arms frantically in front of their faces resulting in shared laughter. Participants commented their movements to each other in conversations about getting imaginary boats out and would accentuate with comments like "how nice it would be to get on the water" during the canoe sequence. One way the program fostered participants' expression in interaction with each other was when the on-screen instructor would question participants during preparations for dance sequences. For example, for the royal wedding section, the instructors would ask what kind of hats participants prefer to wear to weddings. This resulted in participants commenting to each other, "I'm wearing a fascinator," or "I don't wear hats." They would accompany their comments with the miming motions of putting on a hat, watching each other, shaking or nodding their heads in agreement.



***Figure 5: Ennismore participants pose for the camera during their final class of Sharing Dance P3***

## 3.0 Challenges

### 3.1 Critical Mass

The number of participants was an ongoing topic of concern and conversation among participants, facilitators and community administrators in all locations with the exception of the institutional setting. There was ongoing concern that “no one would show” for classes and many classes would begin with discussion about advertising and ideas to spread the word. In one area in particular, a participant indicated that she didn’t feel comfortable in such a small group: “Well there were only two other people in the class and that bothered me because I felt too visible – I like to feel like I blend in and I was self-conscious – if there were 10-12 people it might be different.”

Participants took it upon themselves to get other people interested in the program. One had shared it with both of his seniors’ exercise classes of about twelve people. He also indicated that “it was talked about at the recent seniors’ luncheon and posters were put up.” He added that he had discovered a possible reason for the lack of attendance: “There was some negative association with the previous pilot due to feeling [of being] ‘talked down to’ and the dementia aspects.”

Another participant said, “I would hope we would get more people from the seniors building, but that’s not the case.”



**Figure 6: Three participants are gathered in Lakefield, Ontario**

## 3.2 Communication

From the perspective of participants and facilitators, communication was identified as a challenge in terms of recruitment and understanding expectations. Many participants suggested that the program should be “advertised better – I didn’t hear about it until about session four. A lot of people didn’t know about it. It should be in the newsletter – give people notice.” Facilitators indicated that they could have participated more in recruitment activities: “I could have posted it on social media, shared it with my clients. I don’t know that I ever did get the poster. I think Community Care got it the day before or the day of the session starting.”

Expectations of the program and “designation of roles” needed to be clearer. One participant described how she wasn’t sure if the program was for her: “I was unclear as to what it was going to be. I asked the Community Care person and she said, ‘honestly I don’t know myself.’” One facilitator described how “they sent us a lot of info and we felt a little bit lost after that. It was new and we weren’t sure of our role – just to keep them safe and set it up?” Facilitators also struggled with explaining the program to their residents: “We tried to encourage it, but they had a lot of questions.”

## 3.3 Mode of delivery

### **Introductory sequence**

Participants’ feedback on the mode of delivery was mixed. Positive interactions in conversation resulted from special mentions that were remotely streamed during the program. One participant described how she “felt so special. We just felt that they cared about us. That cemented the group as a special group. It made us feel like we were important.” Many participants were observed cheering and waving when they heard their location named each week; however, there was general consensus that the introductory sequence was too long and that all of the facilitators need not be named every week. Two locations addressed this by fast-forwarding through the downloaded version to where the dancing began.

### **Downloaded vs. streamed mode of delivery**

Some participants and facilitators indicated that they preferred the downloaded option because it eliminated technical difficulties that were experienced during the first pilot when the program was live-streamed. Some struggled with technical difficulties regardless of the choice of streamed or downloaded versions due to laptop settings, automated notifications, pop-up displays, and audio requirements. There were comments that the live version provided a different “feeling” that some felt was missing from the pre-recorded version, but that it didn’t interfere with their enjoyment of the program. Many said that they didn’t notice that it was pre-recorded and felt like, “they were talking right to me.” One facilitator suggested that “the ideal is to have a combination.”

# 4.0 Recommendations

## 4.1 Mode of delivery and instruction

- Continue to provide options such as standing and sitting instructors
- Provide a mix of downloaded, pre-recorded and video stream options, with in-person visits or events
- Add movement direction to cater to active levels and vary or increase use of ballet terms
- Consider the use of institutional settings as community host sites, as well as intergenerational participation opportunities
- Determine the most effective length and duration of program for diverse groups

## 4.2 Role of the facilitator

- Provide increased meeting and conference opportunities for facilitators to share learning with each other before, during and after the program.
- Ensure that host sites are clear about the roles and responsibilities of facilitators.
- Develop a facilitator training program that enables on-site facilitator ownership of the program, including recruitment of participants and host sites, engagement in planning and implementation meetings, and with regards to enhancing in-session participant interaction and expression.
- Provide administrative partners and facilitators with promotional materials and pre-registration paperwork in a timely manner.

## 4.3 Communications

- Develop a communications plan to:
- Identify stakeholders' unique communications channels and requirements.
- Strategize recruitment efforts using market research to engage specific audiences.
- Articulate challenges and opportunities for internal and external communications among partners and on-site facilitators.
- Acknowledge and plan action to engage in discussion to address challenges in community relations of previous pilots, (as discussed in section 3.1).
- Establish a timeline for early/advanced media and community relations opportunities for promotion of program for remaining pilots and continuous expansion.

## 5.0 Next steps

The expansion of the dance program to community settings outside of Brandon is taking place from September through October 2018 (B2). This will be an expansion of Level 1: a program designed for people experiencing significant cognitive and/or physical impairment. The process and outcomes of these overlapping phases will help us to improve our understanding of the potential of Baycrest NBS *Sharing Dance Seniors* for a broad range of older adults with different abilities in different settings. B3 will take place in Spring of 2019 with additional institutional partners.

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