

## **Magpie Dance**

Magpie Dance was founded in 1985 by Avril Hitman BEM who retired from the role of Artistic and Executive Director in 2017. The charity values and approach were founded on the social model of disability – it is up to society to find a way of including people rather than excluding because of disability.



Since the beginning, the aim was for the dancers to have as many opportunities as possible to perform and collaborate with different companies and artists. This remains vital to Magpie Dance today which has now grown from a 45-minute session per week, to 14 sessions per week plus outreach workshops – enabling over 300 people to access regular dance activity sessions each year.

Participants have a range of learning disabilities and are aged 3+, with no upper age limit on taking part. Through dance, the participants gain significant life, social and communication skills with measurable health and wellbeing benefits. Participants stage regular performances and national tours, many in prestigious performing arts venues. Ambitious and talented dancers are supported through professional progression pathways.

*“Avril Hitman has shone a light on learning disability through her visionary creativity and determination that dance be open to all.” - Magpie Dance parent*

Magpie Dance works in partnership with the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, to deliver inclusive dance sessions at Atlas House and Tall Trees each year. The participants include people with a range of complex learning disabilities, some clients on the autism spectrum and with challenging behaviour, plus older clients with dementia.

### ***The impact of Magpie’s sessions***

*“Magpie Dance has been a positive, constructive activity, as activities that are facilitated externally appear to be more popular with the patients. The structure and continuity has encouraged patients to regularly attend and develop within the sessions. Due to medication side effects (within mental health), the patients can suffer from weight gain and difficulty in movements (stiffness restricted movement); for this reason, the Magpie Dance approach to exercise and movement is highly valued and successful in prompting activity and assisting movement”. – Oxleas staff member*

*“This is out of this world for us. It has gone a long way to bring out some of the qualities that we have never witnessed from some of our service users”. – Oxleas staff member*

## **Training**

Magpie Dance have Affiliate status from CDMT, an endorsement of our continuing professional development courses.

Magpie Dance offers inclusive training opportunities for teachers, fitness instructors and dance professionals as well as training for the workplace and bespoke consultancy.

*“I loved it!”; “Lots of ideas; confidence building, interactive”; “Highly insightful on how to use non-verbal communication”.*

If you would like to know more about this charity work visit their website

<https://www.magpiedance.org.uk/about-us/>