

DanceSyndrome set to transform lives internationally

Tuesday 1 October, 2024

Members of DanceSyndrome, a charity set up in Lancashire in 2009, have been invited to Japan to share their bespoke approach and methodology in how they support people with learning disabilities to be leaders, as part of a pioneering project to promote inclusion in Japanese society.

DanceSyndrome transforms lives, creating change and giving joy, hope and opportunities to people with learning disabilities, and their families. Through the medium of inclusive dance, the organisation empowers those with and without learning disabilities to believe they can achieve their ambitions in life, and that having a disability should never be a barrier to following your dreams.

At DanceSyndrome, people with learning disabilities co-lead inclusive dance sessions and take visible Dance Leader roles to inspire people to see what can be achieved when we all become more inclusive. All sessions are co-produced with professional Dance Artists working side by side with trained and qualified Dance Leaders with a learning disability to co-produce high quality inclusive dance sessions for everyone to enjoy together. The Dance Leaders are all visible members of their communities, who can regularly be seen leading workshops, dance performances and community activities.

In recent years, DanceSyndrome's work has been recognised on a national level, with multiple partnerships with NHS England, Foundation of Nursing Studies and other national social care providers, as well as securing funding from National Lottery Community Foundation and Arts Council England (and is a 2023-26 National Portfolio Organisation).

The organisation is now celebrating success on an international level after recently winning a Gold Award in the 2024 International Stevie Awards as a non-profit or Government 'Organization of the Year' and has now been invited to Tokyo to share learning from their inclusive approach to co-delivery.

In September 2023, DanceSyndrome welcomed an international student, from University of Central Lancashire, called Ayuko Hara to volunteer in their Weekly Company Class sessions in Preston. Ayuko was so inspired by her time with DanceSyndrome that she reported this back to a colleague in Japan called Dai Matsuoka, who programmes the Tokyo Accessible Dance Festival on behalf of an organisation called LAND FES.

Dai reached out to the DanceSyndrome team to ask about the potential for them to share DanceSyndrome's approach to co-leadership in Tokyo. Funding for this project was secured in Japan from Arts Council Tokyo and four members of the DanceSyndrome team will be travelling to Japan in November 2024 for a 10 day visit which will enable them to share their co-production methodology, supporting Japanese Dance Artists and dancers with learning disabilities to become more inclusive in their delivery of dance activities, with a view to encouraging greater inclusion in the wider society in Japan which currently is not as advanced as in the UK.

Tokyo-based LAND FES has been working on projects that build creative relationships between dancers and people from all walks of life, including people with disabilities, the elderly and young people receiving support for employment. Through international collaboration and interaction, they have learned that in Japan there are not enough examples of different work and creative processes that encourage inclusion in dance.

Co-produced inclusive dance workshops are very hard to find in Japan and there isn't a system to share learning so that professional dancers can work in an inclusive way, meaning it is even more difficult for people with disabilities to learn to be leaders in dance and other aspects of society. LAND FES is keen to break this cycle by creating new opportunities, increasing accessibility to inclusive dance and deepening the understanding of its value within wider culture.

Dai Matsuoka from LAND FES said *"I feel very honoured and thrilled that we have been able to invite DanceSyndrome members to Tokyo this November. As an organization that is committed to develop and promote inclusive dance in Japan, LAND FES will benefit so much from this international collaboration project. I believe that DanceSyndrome's unique program should be shared more and permeated to empower people with disabilities all over the world."*

Julie Nicholson, DanceSyndrome Managing Director, said *"This project embodies everything that DanceSyndrome stands for. We want to change the way that people think about learning disabilities by sharing the ways that we put inclusion and co-production into practice every single day. Our mission is to*

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go out into the world and demonstrate that people with learning disabilities are able to be dancers and leaders or anything else that they want to be, as long as they are given the right support and opportunities to do that. We are so proud to have been invited to travel to Japan to be held up as an example of what good co-production looks like on an international level."

DanceSyndrome Dance Leader John Burrow will be travelling to Japan with the team. He said *"I'm excited to be going to Japan to share the Dance By Example workshops that I co-deliver here in the UK. Through DanceSyndrome I've gained social life, I've gained friends and a new outlook on my life. I've gained a lot of confidence in myself so when there's moments of self-doubt I'm now able to kind of go "no, I can do this." I'm looking forward to being able to share that with new people in Japan too!"*

The DanceSyndrome representatives will be in Japan from 1st to 10th November 2024. Photos and videos from the trip will be shared on the charity's social media channels. You can follow them on [X](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Linked In](#) and [YouTube](#) at [@DanceSyndromeUK](#)

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