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# Benefits of expressive dance classes in women experiencing homelessness

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Benefits of Expressive Dance Classes in Women Experiencing Homelessness

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An Honors College Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Honors  
James Madison University

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by Ashley Jane Runnells  
May 2017

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Honors, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation,  
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## **Abstract**

This project represents multiple layers of a therapeutic dance experience intended to assist homeless women in increasing their sense of social connectedness, happiness, and self-esteem. Therapeutic dance classes were conducted at Mercy House in Harrisonburg, VA, illuminating the benefits to participants as well as the challenges of engaging this population. Further exploration occurred during the January dance therapy intensive workshop regarding developing of therapeutic dance interventions. The project concluded with a choreographed site-specific dance work exploring the stories of the participants, and a tangible creative response by way of a tea bag dress. Lessons learned included the rich opportunities present in working with homeless women through therapeutic dance and creative arts.

## Introduction

The initial purpose of this project was to add to the relatively limited knowledge base on the effects of dance in a therapeutic context among women experiencing homelessness. The benefits of therapeutic dance on homeless women was explored through objective and subjective measures. Additionally, this project intended to bring awareness to the many issues faced by homeless populations, and the value of therapeutic dance in addressing some of these issues. Inspired by the work with the homeless women, this project expanded to include additional training in therapeutic dance and a creative representation of the experience through a site-specific dance and costume creation.

The primary research project focused on social connectedness, overall happiness and self-esteem among women experiencing homelessness. The general research question was: *What effect will therapeutic dance classes have on homeless women?* The hypotheses were: Expressive dance classes will increase social connectedness among homeless women. Expressive dance classes will increase self-esteem levels in homeless women. Expressive dance classes will increase overall levels of happiness in homeless women.

In terms of social wellbeing, the program aimed to help participants gain a sense of connection to the other women in the group. In the psychological dimension, this program intended to assist the women in finding an increased level of overall happiness and self-esteem. Specifically, the study examined the social connectedness, self-esteem, and overall happiness of the women in the study. The

participants were scored on the Social Assurances and Social Connectedness scales, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale, and the Oxford Happiness questionnaire. The results of the scales were compared from the beginning of the study to the end of the study using a repeated measures design. This study and the survey instruments were approved by the James Madison University Institutional Review Board as well as the Director of Mercy House of Harrisonburg, Virginia.

### **Review of the Literature**

Dance therapy is a relatively new field in counseling, only prominently emerging in the 1980s, though it has been used to an extent since the mid-1900s. The basic premise of dance therapy is that the body, mind, and spirit are interconnected (About, 2015). The actual movement that occurs is spontaneous and unstructured. This movement may be presented in a variety of formats, for the process of dancing is seen as therapeutic rather than the outcome of any specific type of dance. The participants in dance therapy need no prior training as the emphasis is on freedom of movement rather than skill. Dance therapy addresses issues in three main areas of functioning: social, physical, and psychological (Gladding, 1992). Overall, the belief is that freedom of movement will lead to healing in these contexts (Jones, 2005).

The American Dance Therapy Association, the governing body of dance/movement therapy, requires the Board Certified Dance/Movement Therapist (BC-DMT) as a required credential for practicing dance therapy. As such, this program cannot be called dance therapy due to the lack of licensure. Instead, the

elements of dance/movement therapy are researched and noted, and applied in a therapeutic context, not unlike dance therapy itself (About, 2015). To put this in context, the objectives for the participants in this study were divided into the three main categories addressed by dance therapy. Physically, the goal was to get the participants moving in a way that is uncommon in everyday life. This served to assist in reducing physical tension. In the social category, the program aimed to help participants gain a sense of connection to the other women in the group. In the psychological dimension, this program intended to assist the women in finding increased levels of overall happiness and self-esteem.

The benefits of the arts in general in counseling, and dance specifically, as measured in a therapeutic context, are drawn from research representing a wide variety of populations. Some broad benefits include helping to establish a connection between body and mind, establishing a new sense of self in a creative context, and developing self-esteem (Gladding, 1992). Connectivity benefits include the promotion of interpersonal communication and connection to other group members (Gladding, 1992). Therapeutic benefits include a focus on goals with progress clearly visible, the development of insight to see one's situation from a new perspective, and active energy and reflection which leads to improved functioning (Gladding, 1992).

### **Addressing Issues Faced by Homeless Women using Therapeutic Dance**

There are many issues faced by women experiencing homelessness, quite a few of which revolve around basic needs such as finding adequate shelter, food,

healthcare, and resources (Luck et al., 2002). These issues were not addressed in this program as dance therapy is not well suited to assist in these areas. Instead, this program focused on the ability to assist in processing issues faced by a vast majority of homeless women: substance abuse, mental illness, familial issues such as being a single mother, and physical and sexual abuse (Luck et al., 2002).

Through the experience of processing, the women were hypothesized to develop higher levels of happiness and self-esteem and higher levels of connectivity to the self and others.

The program structure was based on a variety of sources including dance therapy programs for a wide range of participants (Jones, 2005). Because there is relatively little research on past programs conducted specifically with homeless populations, the expressive dance classes drew upon dance therapy and general art therapy classes conducted with various populations. These programs are not specifically detailed, but are deconstructed to list the associated techniques in the techniques section.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were homeless women with dependent children from the Harrisonburg community. Participants were identified and recruited in cooperation with the executive director and staff of Mercy House in Harrisonburg. Mercy House shares relationships and services with other organizations that support homeless women and children so invitations for participants were issued to three other organizations in the Harrisonburg community. Through these

invitations, recruitment also occurred at another shelter in Harrisonburg. Despite two recruitment visits, no women from the second shelter chose to participate in the dance classes.

The women who participated in the sessions were either staff members or clients at Mercy House. The staff members had been working at Mercy House for at least one year. Two of the three staff members were former clients of Mercy House, but since then had obtained permanent housing and full-time work. The clients who attended the classes had been at Mercy House between a week and three months. They all had dependent children who lived with them in Mercy House housing. These mothers had between one and four children, and various marital statuses.

We experienced difficulty in getting women to commit to attending the classes. This difficulty was anticipated and addressed by offering an incentive and accommodations. If the participants attended the majority of the classes they were offered a 25-dollar grocery gift card by Mercy House. In order to eliminate possible barriers, childcare was offered by daycare staff for the duration of the classes. Mothers with older children and grandchildren requested allowing the children to attend the classes. This request was accepted in hopes that mothers would be more likely to participate in classes with their children. These children became an important part of sessions, so material was altered to suit both children and adults. The children ranged from three months to eleven years old.

## Method

The study was structured as a repeated measures design and was analyzed using a paired samples t test. Participants first signed a consent form addressing possible benefits, risks, and questions. In order to minimize risks, participants were encouraged to move in a way that was comfortable for them and did not exceed their limitations. In addition, participants were informed that they were welcome to stop activity at point. Participants completed a survey containing three psychologically valid and reliable questionnaires: the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Social Connectedness and the Social Assurance Scales (see Appendix A).

The participants completed the survey in paper and pencil form on their first day participating in the study and on the last day of the study. Throughout the study, participants took part in expressive dance classes on a twice a week basis. Each session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. These classes consisted of a gentle physical warm-up, verbal discussion, structured movement, unstructured movement, and ended with a mindfulness activity. Themes for the sessions included: relationships, gratitude, balance, communication, emotions, and personal growth.

The study lasted four weeks, with two expressive dance class taking place each week, excluding the first week where only one class occurred due to a holiday. Participants were not required to attend every session in acknowledgement of the

somewhat transient nature of the population, but were encouraged to attend as many sessions as possible.

The survey collected a coded identifier for each individual participant. These codes were given in acknowledgement of the sensitive nature of the material collected by the survey. The codes were constructed in such a way that the data was not able to be associated with any particular participant. Thus, these coded identifiers ensured that data was confidential.

Each of the following techniques used in sessions aimed to facilitate growth in one of the three core categories of social, physical, and psychological focus.

Techniques were gathered from *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* (Nachmanovitch, 1990) and *The Intimate Act of Choreography* (Blom & Chaplin, 1982).

- *Mirroring* allowed participants to connect while still maintaining boundaries. This process first has one person lead movement and a partner follow while reflecting the movement as closely as possible. Both partners then participate in the mirroring without designating either person as the leader. This serves to increase sensitivity to one's partner without crossing physical boundaries.
- The *stream* is a technique which treats every movement produced as important, and as a stream of consciousness from the producer. This was used to help the women begin to value what they personally can produce.

- The *use of props* provided another opportunity for connectivity with others. The prop, most often a giant squishy dice, served as part of a shared experience among the group which provided an immediate, tangible reason for needing connection.
- The *pair walk* involved two participants walking together with the follower closing her eyes, and the leader being allowed to stop or start moving at any time. This built heightened awareness to others in the group as well as the self by noticing the ways the in which one responds and initiates.
- *Back-to-back conversations* shares the same goals of self and other connectivity. This exercise involved two people sitting back to back and gradually moving to express a thought, while remaining sensitive to their partner's nonverbal communication.

Each session began by standing in a circle and each person pairing a movement with their name. Variations included a movement to describe oneself, a movement directly associated with the topic for that day, and a movement to describe how one was feeling that day. The sessions began this way to in order to bring each participant into the present moment, focusing on oneself, and the others in the room. A circle was specifically chosen because it is an inclusive shape that allows each person to easily notice every other person in the room. The movement was paired with words to get the participants more comfortable with creating

movement in a non-threatening way. This was particularly important because some individuals expressed apprehension about never having danced before.

Reflection at the conclusion of each session was included to help participants consolidate and integrate any newly found insights as well as providing closure for any emotions or issues that may have been brought up during the class. Sessions then ended with a meditative or mindful exercise. This was used to bring closure to the session as well as bring awareness to calming the body and the mind.

Mindfulness was chosen to close the sessions because it helped to integrate emotions that may have come up during the session as well as providing relaxation. It has also been shown to facilitate acceptance and processing emotions, specifically in a population of homeless youth (Viafora, Mathiesen, & Unsworth, 2015). In addition to mindfulness, progressive muscle relaxation was used as it has been shown experimentally to help reduce sadness and state anxiety, and increase relaxation and self-confidence (Harris, 2003).

## **Results**

The quantitative results in this study were inconclusive. The homeless population at Mercy House was somewhat transient by nature. As such, we did not have participation consistently from the same participants. We were also not able to obtain before and after measures for every participant.

The most consistent participants were two women who work at the shelter (one attended five sessions and the other attended three sessions) and one homeless mom. Unfortunately, we were not able to obtain the after measure for this mom

because she moved away before that data could be collected. Of the two women who work at the shelter, it seems likely that their survey responses were inaccurate. Specifically, the reverse coded questions were answered in opposite manner to the non-reverse coded questions. For example, one participant indicated a high level of self-esteem on the non-reverse coded questions, but a very low level of self-esteem on the reverse coded questions. These issues taken into consideration, it is more beneficial to report the qualitative results of the study.

After the completion of the study, the qualitative results were gathered from interviews conducted with staff members who had participated. They indicated that the biggest benefits from the classes were taking time to look at their feelings, having a space to be transparent, and relieving stress. Structuring the majority of the class without music allowed participants to tune in to their own thoughts and emotions. One staff member particularly appreciated this element, especially as she had been expecting a more traditional dance class with music and set movements. Discussion throughout the sessions provided the space to be transparent with one's thoughts, both verbally and through movement. Staff members said that they immediately felt comfortable enough in the environment to share these thoughts. Stress relief was a benefit that was brought up multiple times throughout the interview. Staff believed that this was the biggest benefit to homeless moms who participated in the classes. The classes allowed one to get her mind off all the things that must be dealt with on a day-to-day basis, and allowed

her to instead focus on relaxation. One participant even said that she always came to the classes feeling incredibly stressed out, and left feeling very happy.

Staff members were also asked about what they believed the biggest barriers were to this program. The most consistent answer was a lack of participation. This issue has been noted in most activities offered to clients of Mercy House. Staff explained that these families are in chaos. As such, they are not willing to participate in activities that take them out of their comfort zone, or that require too much energy. Instead, they focus their mental resources on simply surviving, day-to-day.

After conducting the classes, it became clear that allowing older children to attend classes was surprisingly inhibitive to the mothers participating in dancing. When both mother and child(ren) attended classes, the children tended to be very involved and receptive to dancing and discussion. Meanwhile the mothers would be less participative, adding fewer comments, creating smaller movements, or sitting and not participating in the classes at all. Based on these observations as well as interviews with Mercy House staff, we believe this may be due to embarrassment on the part of the moms, or a belief that the class is more beneficial to the children than the mom herself, so the moms felt less of a need to be involved.

Contrary to the experience with older children participating in the classes, we found that including a mother's infant was facilitative to the mother's participation in the classes. She was more open to sharing her thoughts when her infant was in the room versus when the infant was in the daycare. The infant

provided a source of creativity for her mother. When the mom could not think of a movement she often looked to her daughter who provided lots of ideas in the form of kicking, wiggling, and looking around. We also noticed that the mother was experiencing a greater depth of positive emotion when her daughter was dancing with her. For example, during the session on thankfulness, she hesitantly mentioned distal areas of her life for which she was thankful, which were largely unconnected to her as a person. However, as soon as she looked to her daughter, she immediately spelled out her daughter's name as the thing for which she was most thankful. It was one of the moments in which she was most actively involved in an exercise in any session.

### **Areas for Future Research**

It is recommended that future studies utilize objective measures in conjunction with subjective measures to obtain a more accurate view of the benefits of dance classes with homeless women. As suggested by the results of this study, stress relief was a main benefit, so measuring stress levels pre- and post-intervention may give insight into the direct benefits of the classes. It is suggested that a larger N be used in order to generate appropriate power, which will allow for statistical analysis. It would be beneficial to obtain before, midpoint, and after measures for all participants. Recognizing the transient nature of this population, this objective could be achieved by having participants complete the measures before the first session and after every session. Additionally, it would be beneficial to determine any long-lasting effects resulting from the dance classes. Ideally,

there would be additional follow-up measures at 12 months. Though, considering the number of changes in circumstances that a homeless woman can experience in 12 months, it would be difficult to determine if any observed results are due to the dance classes, or due to changes in circumstances. So, long-lasting effects might be better measured at three months post intervention.

Recommendations for similar studies are also offered based upon observations from sessions and interviews with staff. Collaborating with multiple agencies would provide a wider pool of possible participants. Within sessions, it would give a greater diversity of experience. It is also recommended that opening the demographics (i.e. to include men and all ages of children) would again provide a greater number of willing participants. Selecting a location that can remain constant throughout the study is important to provide a sense of consistency, especially when much in the lives of the participants frequently change. The last recommendation is to provide incentives such as food or prizes. This is suggested in order to provide extra motivation to those who feel that they do not have the energy to attempt anything outside their normal routine.

### **Dance Therapy Intensive Workshop**

In January 2017, the researcher attended a three-day dance therapy workshop intensive hosted by Antioch University. The workshop was structured in such a way that attendees were able to take the perspective of both clinician and participant, depending on the situation. The intention behind attending the

workshop was to provide a greater context and knowledge base for the expressive dance classes project.

Many of the techniques that were discussed and implemented at the workshop were the same techniques that were used in dance classes at Mercy House. Though the techniques were the same, the workshop expanded upon the rationale for using certain techniques as well as how they can be integrated into a class setting. Additionally, the workshop explored other art forms in conjunction with dance, developmental movement patterns, and clinical applications.

As noted above, each expressive dance class began with a circle where participants were invited to share their name and a movement. This structure was also used during the workshop. The difference was that a concept called “the power of three,” repeating a name and movement three times, each with a different focus, was employed in the workshop. A participant shared her name and movement, and immediately, everyone would say her name and perform her movement to become used to it. The second time, the purpose was to reflect the name and movement back to the participant to whom they belonged. The third repetition was intended to take the movement into one’s own body and see what it meant personally. This technique was beneficial because it allowed everyone to feel connected as those around them joined their expressions. It also allowed each participant to take mentally what she needed from every movement performed. Though not examined, the repetition of names and movement at the beginning of Mercy House sessions may have had a similar impact.

One unexpected aspect of this workshop was the integration of multiple art forms, not solely dance, to inform the therapeutic potential. In fact, the first activity of the workshop was creating a personal poster that included one's name and things that are important in our lives. When exploring developmental movement patterns, dance and drawing were constantly alternated. These two experiences exemplified how the use of multiple modalities allows participants to have different entries into the therapeutic space. Even in a dance therapy session, participants are not always comfortable starting with movement, or using movement to express certain concepts. In these cases, other art forms or activities are more beneficial for getting the participant actively engaged.

Though I was not initially aware of this integration, I too used other modalities in addition to dance. One of these paralleled an activity that we performed extensively on the first day of the workshop. In the workshop, we threw a ball back and forth while saying things that we are. For example, one might say "I am a sister" or "I am a lover of cooking." In the expressive dance classes, we threw a squishy dice back and forth while saying parts of ourselves for which we are grateful. This exercise was performed in both cases to allow the participants to express their thoughts both verbally and in an embodied way. Though there was not always a strong awareness of it, our bodies responded to what we were saying. This was an easy way to integrate speech and movement without asking participants to be consciously aware of what their bodies were saying. It also

allowed participants to engage as deeply or as shallowly in the concept as they felt comfortable.

The second day of the workshop focused largely on the Kestenberg Movement Profile. This system outlines ten rhythms that occur developmentally, and continue to reappear throughout the lifespan. Each rhythm represents a different stage in life and associates meaning to what a person might be experiencing if they continually display that rhythm in their movement (Sample, n.d.). For example, one of the children who participated in classes at Mercy House tended to display a snapping rhythm. This rhythm is characterized by sharp transitions, and a tense and release quality to movement. Biting rhythms indicate separation and boundary formation, so it might be concluded that this girl was going through a process of defining herself as an individual and discovering where her boundaries lie. Another participant usually displayed the swaying rhythm in her movement. This is characterized by an overall low intensity movement that ebbs and flows. Swaying rhythms are indicative of the need to integrate present and past needs. This might mean that she was struggling to integrate her more demanding responsibilities as a mom, and the needs that she still holds from her past.

### **First Creative Response: Site-Specific Dance Work: “Mercy”**

In response to the expressive dance classes, the researcher created a site-specific dance work (see Appendix B). The researcher cast herself, six dance majors, and the assistant to the research in the site-specific piece. Each dancer was assigned to one of the main people the researcher encountered through the sessions

at Mercy House. The dancers were not told the name or defining characteristics (e.g. one of the women working at Mercy House) of the person they were portraying. Rather, they were initially given three descriptive words, derived by the researcher and assistant that encompass the personality of the person while providing movement possibility. For example, one dancer was given the words: overwhelmed, searching, and helpless. Another dancer was given the words: thoughtful, energetic, and easily distracted.

At the initial rehearsal, the dancers were given these descriptive words and were instructed to improvise movement emulating these words for 10 minutes. At the end of the 10 minutes, they were to share a short phrase containing the movements they found most pertinent. After seeing these phrases, the researcher and assistant arranged, altered, and added material to create a phrase including all dancers. This collaborative method was used in the first rehearsal for two reasons. The goal was to have the dancers produce pure movement that was unaffected by the tone of the piece or whatever notions they held about the outcome of the piece. To ensure these were avoided, dancers created their own movement before they were exposed to the style of the piece. The collaborative structure was also used because it mirrored the classes at Mercy House. The classes were never solely the movement of the researcher. Instead, they were ideas presented which the participants were then able to interpret and make their own. This structure was important in the expressive dance classes because it gave the participants a sense of autonomy and control. By being in charge of their own movement, they could

determine how much and at what point they would share. This overall structure was important to include in the rehearsal process because it similarly gave the dancers a sense of control and being intertwined in the process.

### **Second Creative Response: Tea Bag Dress**

Another element of the response portion was the tea bag dress (see Appendix B). This idea came about after the fifth session. After we had officially ended the session, one of the women who works at Marcy House told us a story about a tea bag quilt. A young girl that she knew had created a quilt entirely out of tea bags. Initially pale, the tea bags began to display color when they were exposed to water. Much of the quilt was neutral – tans and browns, but parts of it displayed much bolder color. These were the oranges, pinks, and crimsons. She went on to explain the deeper meaning behind the quilt. There were sweet teas and bitter teas representing both the sweet and bitter moments in life. The tans and browns represented much of everyday life, while the bright colors showcased the extremes. These were the times in life when one went through fire. These were the times that tested the limits of what a person could handle, and threatened to overwhelm. The point of the color was that the tans would not be the same without the colors. We could not learn to find joy in the ordinary if we had not experienced the pain of the crimson days. We would not have become who we are without the trials of the bold days. Each of us would simply not exist in the way that we do without having experienced the sweet, the bitter, the tan, the crimson, and all the days in between. This story in and of itself was beautiful. It left us reeling from the implications.

The metaphor fit perfectly for the women at Mercy House, many of whom were in their own crimson days.

After that night, the idea of the tea bag quilt was continually striking. It was decided that this had to be a part of the response because it explained the worlds of the Mercy House residents so well. The idea of the tea bag quilt morphed into the idea of a tea bag dress so that the tea bag concept could be fully integrated into the final dance piece. Additionally, it provided a visual representation for the audience of what the women were experiencing internally. Even if the viewers of the piece did not recognize the dress as serving this function, it was still important to include it because it provided meaning and motivation for the dancers.

The dress itself was created in such a way that it visually portrayed many pieces that were experienced throughout the sessions. The overall shape and style of the dress portray both youth and innocence. Though surprising to find these qualities in our participants, they were noticed over and over again; the mothers simply seemed too young and naïve to be taking care of a family. The tops of tea bags showed in each row to represent how the women were more open to sharing their experience than was initially expected, yet, parts of tea bags were still hidden, in the same way that parts of the women's lives were hidden. The tea bags that were used were different sizes to embody the imperfection of the experiences of each woman. Nothing lines up quite right, and the square tea bags just do not seem to belong, much like the women, and even we ourselves, wonder why some moments in our lives are a part of our experience.

## Final Reflection

This project has demonstrated both the necessity and the difficulty of researching in the areas of dance therapy and in the population of homeless women. The overall deficit of literature in the dance therapy field is perhaps the biggest issue. This deficit does make sense, considering the value placed upon research in this field, as well as the difficulty of intervention. Dance therapy tends to be concerned with teaching practitioners the various strategies for working with clients. It even focuses on what interventions might be beneficial with what types of clients, but most of this information is based upon work with clients. That is to say, there is little research supporting what sorts of interventions are most effective. Even at the graduate level, faculty at the intensive workshop explained that research is important, but they focus upon implementation of dance therapy. This reveals a fundamental problem with the field. Practitioners are intent on creating change in clients, yet the evidence for creating this change is largely absent. In the coming years, it will be necessary for dance therapy to develop research that adequately supports the necessity of providing this unique therapy to clients. It appears that in order for this to happen, there needs to be a shift in the mindset of practitioners and those who intend to become practitioners.

This problem is explained at least in part by the difficulty of creating dance interventions. By the nature of dance therapy, the intervention cannot be exactly the same each time it is administered. It is not codified in such a way that a set intervention can be administered, owing to the creative nature of it. The potential

for creative release as a way to access deeper parts of oneself cannot be strictly governed because it is dependent upon the person. While this may be an issue for developing strong research, it is also what makes dance therapy so attractive. Additionally, dance therapy is much more process based. Even if the same technique is used multiple times, the experience is different because it takes the responses of participants into account, both verbal and nonverbal, and evolves according to this. All of these combine to mean that even if research is conducted, it is difficult to determine what aspect or aspects of the program are the most important for producing therapeutic change.

Despite these obvious limitations, the positive impact of dance became apparent throughout the duration of this project - both through the expressive dance classes and the intensive workshop. At points in my life, dance has been a release, but I had never appreciated the possibility of it in a therapeutic context. Though there was not strict data to support the effectiveness of the dance classes in the women, I saw a difference, even if only for a little while. I saw two young girls find another outlet for their energy. I saw a stressed-out mom smile and join the group. I saw a girl, far too young to be a mother, think about the things she still appreciates about herself. The changes were not huge, but perhaps they cultivated the seed of change. It was profound to see dance, which means so much to me, help another person.

Working with the homeless women taught me more than I could have expected. In reading the literature on this population, I became aware of some of

the issues they face. Things like frequent job loss, mental illness, and emotional issues caused by trauma were all things I was aware of by the time I began the dance classes. However, I did not fully understand these realities until I started working with them. There were days when it was hard to hear the diagnoses the women had, recognizing that they did not have a way to treat these issues. Even though I knew that their lives were thrown into chaos, it was still easy to become frustrated when a woman chose not to come to a class even though she had no other obligations to fulfill that afternoon. Even though I knew access to food is an issue for this population, I did not understand this reality until I saw a child enter the food pantry and joyfully fill a bag with food. These experiences taught me how important it is to enter into a person's space. I could have known all the typical circumstances homeless women face before I began, but I would not have truly understood until I experienced working with them. I think of this in terms of my future career as a counselor – it is far more important to enter into the same mental space with an individual person than it is to know about the circumstances of a specific population.

This project has opened up new possibilities for me. I had conceptualized psychology and dance as two very important parts of my life, but as ones that were largely separate. Dance therapy became the way that these two areas crossed over, in a meaningful way. My knowledge of psychological concepts informed my program design, and the ways in which I interacted with participants, striving to reach the goal of therapeutic change. My knowledge of dance helped me find unique

ways to access the mind through the body. This combination was important because it showed me the possibility of finding pathways that allow my passions to come together. Perhaps I will pursue dance therapy in the future, or perhaps I will not. Regardless of my future career choice, dance therapy and the women I met through this project have had a significant impact on my life.

## Appendix A

### Survey Materials

#### Oxford Happiness Questionnaire

Each question is answered on the following Likert scale:

1 = strongly disagree

2 = moderately disagree

3 = slightly disagree

4 = slightly agree

5 = moderately agree

6 = strongly agree

1. I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am.
2. I am intensely interested in other people.
3. I feel that life is very rewarding.
4. I have very warm feelings towards almost everyone.
5. I rarely wake up feeling rested.
6. I am not particularly optimistic about the future.
7. I find most things amusing.
8. I am always committed and involved.
9. Life is good.
10. I do not think that the world is a good place.
11. I laugh a lot.
12. I am well satisfied about everything in my life.

13. I don't think I look attractive.
14. There is a gap between what I would like to do and what I have done.
15. I am very happy.
16. I find beauty in some things.
17. I always have a cheerful effect on others.
18. I can fit in (find time for) everything I want to.
19. I feel that I am not especially in control of my life.
20. I feel able to take anything on.
21. I feel fully mentally alert.
22. I often experience joy and elation.
23. I don't find it easy to make decisions.
24. I don't have a particular sense of meaning and purpose in my life.
25. I feel I have a great deal of energy.
26. I usually have a good influence on events.
27. I don't have fun with other people.
28. I don't feel particularly healthy.
29. I don't have particularly happy memories of the past.

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Questions are answered on the following Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Agree

2 = Agree

3 = Disagree

4 = Strongly Disagree

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. At times I think I am no good at all.
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I certainly feel useless at times.
7. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on equal plane with others.
8. I wish that I could have more respect for myself.
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

The Social Connectedness and the Social Assurance Scales

Questions are answered on the following Likert scale:

1 = strongly disagree

2 = moderately disagree

3 = slightly disagree

4 = slightly agree

5 = moderately agree

6 = strongly agree

Social Connectedness

1. I feel disconnected from the world around me.
2. Even around people I know, I don't feel that I really belong.
3. I feel so distant from people.
4. I have no sense of togetherness with my peers.
5. I don't feel related to anyone.
6. I catch myself losing all sense of connectedness with society.
7. Even among my friends, there is no sense of brother/sisterhood.
8. I don't feel that I participate with anyone or any group.

#### Social Assurance

1. I feel more comfortable when someone is constantly with me.
2. I'm more at ease doing things together with other people.
3. Working side by side with others is more comfortable than working alone.
4. My life is incomplete without a buddy beside me.
5. It's hard for me to use my skills and talents without someone beside me.
6. I stick to my friends like glue.
7. I join groups more for the friendship than the activity itself.
8. I wish to find someone who can be with me all the time.

## **Appendix B**

### Link to supplemental pictures and videos

The following link contains pictures from the expressive dance classes at Mercy House, pictures of the tea bag dress, videos of the site-specific process, and a video of the final site-specific performance:

<http://expressivedanceclasses.weebly.com>

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