

My danceSing Experience – member testimonial

Dear danceSing,

I have been attending danceSing classes since April 2016. I had never attended any fitness classes or choir sessions before. I had been going through a very bad time (marital problems) and was suffering from low mood and low-level reactive depression. I had attended a handful of counselling sessions offered by the NHS and Life Link, which had varied levels of success. I declined my GP's offer to prescribe me anti-depressants so she urged me – I think of it as 'prescribed' me – to try the danceSing sessions that were about to start up at my local Baths, to help to lift my mood and reduce my stress levels (I have high blood pressure). We were both concerned about my mental health.

I would like to mention that my GP is quite formidable and very open-minded about alternative treatments – she would often recommend natural remedies to supplement medicines or medical treatments; I have a lot of respect for her.

I had seen the danceSing posters at the Baths but I have never gone to any exercise classes or choir groups before due to lack of self-confidence and fear of suffering by comparison with other members who I envisaged were bound to be fitter / more confident / more able than I was.

The first few classes that I attended were great fun. My main interest was the singing part, the dancing was the price I would have to pay for getting to sing in a choir, which I had wanted to try for years. My dancing was awful and I felt terribly self-conscious. However, the leaders were talented, funny, supportive and friendly and I realised that there was no pressure to 'perform'; the emphasis was on doing what you were able to do with the aim of improving over the course of the term. I learned to embrace the fact that I was not very good and to focus on enjoying the movement and the music, which was very liberating and stress-relieving. Concentrating on steps and movements was a very welcome form of mindfulness. Over time I did improve and this has boosted my confidence because it proved to me that I was still capable of learning new skills, at a time when my opinion of myself and my abilities was very, very low.

Since then, I have had the absolute pleasure of performing with danceSing in public at a fellow member's birthday party, attended by the cream of Scottish film, TV and theatre (intimidating!), at a food festival, in a supermarket, in a prestigious local venue, in a theatre alongside a fantastic orchestra and an array of musical theatre performers, in a crowded upmarket shopping centre in Glasgow on a Saturday afternoon, and, very significant to me, on my local high street on a glorious Saturday afternoon during the West End Festival. If anyone would have told me four and a half years ago that I would ever have considered, much less thoroughly enjoyed, singing and dancing with my friends on Byres Road, I would never have believed it. I would never have had the nerve, the self-belief, the trust in other people or the positive attitude to have done that before danceSing. I would never have stepped out of my comfort zone repeatedly pre-danceSing and it has given me the self-confidence to try other new experiences, ultimately getting a job (after years of being a stay at home Mum) and working with the public, which I love.

A massive factor in my love for danceSing has been the social element. The turning point going from liking danceSing to loving it and looking forward to it every week (at that time I attended one class per week; pre-lockdown I was attending three per week) was when I was persuaded to join the class leaders and members for the regular coffee after class. Due to my personal circumstances, I had

danceSing, the choir that keeps you fit!

become rather insular and avoided socialising. I got to know the most amazing, inspiring, interesting and funny group of women. danceSing had already felt like a very inclusive and safe space to me, a haven from the outside world and my personal concerns. However, now danceSing is a support network and I feel a great sense of solidarity when I enter the danceSing space. In lockdown, doing live classes online via Facebook, I still feel that sense of community and support as we exchange greetings and banter in the Comments.

There is a warm feeling of acceptance in the classes; there is no pressure, no judging, no competitiveness (well, perhaps a little when we are reaching for the high notes in certain songs). At various points in classes, I have become emotional because of life outside danceSing classes or because the music or lyrics has touched me – I know I am not the only one – and the comfort and support from the instructors and classmates has been heart-warming.

It is a fact that I always feel better after a dance-Sing session, whether in person or via an online session. The rare occasions when I have felt too low to participate, I have regretted it because I miss the buzz and the high from the post-exercise endorphins, from the satisfaction in moving my body and singing at the top of my lungs, and from the warm glow of the chat and laughs with my friends.

The company director and her team of instructors and deserve a lot of credit. Natalie Garry, the Director, is talented, dynamic and very experienced and qualified in the world of dance and fitness. She also has a very personal touch and knows all the class members. Natalie's enthusiasm for danceSing and its multiple benefits is boundless and extremely contagious, and it has bound together the members, infecting us with her love of exercise and music. Her warmth and approachability are a huge key to the feeling of welcome, companionability, safety and security in the classes. She also has a knack for recruiting like-minded instructors so that the warmth and support is replicated throughout the sessions even when she is not there in person. Likewise, danceSing's Musical Director, Lindsay Ashworth Fraser, is a marvellous teacher and chooses songs for us to sing that are uplifting and incrementally challenging so that we learn and develop over the term.

Since joining danceSing, I have become a convert, even evangelical. For years, I have swum and gone to the gym, both of which I love and which keep me fit and strong. danceSing brings the additional benefits of fun, friendship, solidarity and humour. It has also given me a much-needed structure and purpose, especially during lockdown. Moreover, very significantly, I trust Natalie and the danceSing team as they are so experienced and well-qualified - I have faith in their expertise. I can feel the improvement in my singing technique, my tone, fitness, flexibility and physical coordination. My self-confidence and mood have improved through my re-discovered capability for learning. If I am feeling low, I can turn to these classes to lift me up and the results will last all day. Bumping into new danceSing friends when I am out and about cheers me up immensely because it reminds me that I am part of a community. In my head, if I have the nerve and confidence to sing and dance on my local high street, I can achieve anything.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my GP for 'prescribing' danceSing to me, as well as to danceSing itself. I can honestly say that danceSing has radically improved my quality of life and it continues to have an immensely positive effect on my mental health. I recommend it to everyone.

danceSing Member since April 2016