

**making it  
happen**

*a toolkit for Youth Dance*



# INGLETON YOUTH DANCE

Written by Zanna Dennis

Zanna returned to the Yorkshire Dales after training at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance, initially beginning a career as a Freelance Dance Artist before co-founding Blue Moose Dance Company in 2015, allowing her to channel her interests through a range of Community, Educational and Youth Dance delivery across the North West of England.



Image Credit: Dan Archer

## WHAT DREW YOU TO THE RURAL STEPS PROJECT?

My aims for being involved in the Rural Steps project as Lead Artist for Ingleton Youth Dance were to both further develop myself as a Youth Dance Artist whilst being supported to further develop the group. I wanted to reach new participants, establish new partnerships and fundraising strategies and open up further performance and choreographic opportunities to the group, specifically aspirational opportunities with other Youth Dance companies and Professional Artists, to support their development.

## ABOUT INGLETON YOUTH DANCE

In 2016 I established Ingleton Youth Dance (as part of the Blue Moose family) to provide a progression route for young dancers who were coming through our successful Primary School creative dance provision in the local area. When joining the Rural Steps project in 2019, Ingleton Youth Dance had started to become an established group, progressing in their technique, creative and performance work, and gaining new performance opportunities in the wider district.

Ingleton Youth Dance meet weekly for 1.5 hour workshops, and in addition to this, regularly perform their work at local and regional events. We are proud of our youth-led and person-centred approach which we believe allows each young person to grow, flourish and be empowered to reach their potential. All performance work is created in collaboration with our young people, exploring themes, topics and issues relevant to young people today, enabling Ingleton Youth Dance to be a voice for Youth and the Arts in our area.

## INGLETON YOUTH DANCE AND RURAL STEPS

When looking at the development potential for Ingleton Youth Dance through their involvement with the Rural Steps project, I set a list of aims to help us expand in new ways.

### INCREASE NUMBERS

The local area has an established Private Dance School sector, which has largely influenced the local community's understanding of what 'dance' is. When establishing Youth Dance provision and recruiting further through the Rural Steps project, it has been challenging to communicate exactly what Youth Dance is, and how its value and impact, although different, has equal importance and recognition to the Private Dance School provision.

I decided to deliver a series of taster sessions in local schools to raise the profile of Ingleton Youth Dance. Difficulties arose initially in trying to match artist availability with school timetables and some schools already had a strong connection with Private Dance Schools so it was difficult to communicate the benefit of this alternative provision. However, once taster sessions began, the sessions were really positive. Whilst they didn't initially result in new company members, these sessions did allow me to make a connection for further work for myself as an Artist, which in turn may support raising the profile for the future.

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### DEVELOP THE QUALITY OF PERFORMANCE WORK

Forming the group in 2016, I spent the first three years of delivery focusing on introducing contemporary dance technique, developing confidence in creative tasks and building a healthy culture within the group, especially as many dancers came with little prior dance experience and/or were new to Youth Dance. At this stage I wanted to focus on developing the quality of their performances as I felt the group were now ready to create more challenging and sophisticated pieces which pushed their creative boundaries and technical skills. In order to do this I started by developing more targeted technique exercises to support the particular performance work we were focusing on and approached its content in an accessible manner to help the range of experience in the group. I continued to challenge the group with new creative tasks to generate new movement content and provide a broader range of stimulus to inspire them. Being a rural group, access to performances are very limited and so I chose to use the Rural Steps project to expose the group to more performances by Professional Dance Companies in theatre settings and see other Youth Dance Companies in performance to inspire and provoke creative thought. The company also started taking part in local performance opportunities to develop their confidence and performance experience.

I began to approach planning differently to allow more time for rehearsal of performance work ahead of performances/submission deadlines. I delivered a one-day intensive at the start of the new term to generate ideas and explore choreographic possibilities for a new piece of work. Spending a full day together allowed for us to work in a more focused and in depth manner and create large quantities of creative material. This enabled the weekly sessions to then be used more effectively for the development and rehearsal of the piece, ensuring dancers felt better prepared and confident in the work, which was clear in performances as a result. I also started filming rehearsals and invited constructive feedback from the group in order to inform developments and improvements, empowering the group to take ownership for the development of their own work.

## DEVELOP A FUNDRAISING STRATEGY

Ingleton Youth Dance is primarily funded through weekly participant fees (paid a term in advance) and support from the wider Blue Moose family so I wanted to develop a fundraising strategy, with a particular focus on sponsorship, to ensure the group remains sustainable and can provide further performance and development opportunities for the dancers. Through the Rural Steps project I attended fundraising training with a local Arts Consultant focusing on unlocking the purpose and value of the provision and how and who this needs to be communicated to in order to be successful in gaining support. Following this training, I decided to produce and distribute a sponsorship pack to raise funds from local businesses and organisations and was successful in gaining funds from the Rotary Club of Lunesdale, which supported dancers to attend new performance events by covering transport costs and providing costumes. The aspects you rarely have budget for! Moving forward, I believe in order to improve our uptake of sponsorship partners, we need to allow more time to meet with partners face-to-face to build relationships, rather than relying solely on printed materials to convey our message.



Image Credits Dan Archer

## IMPROVE MARKETING

As a company, we are committed to working from a participant led approach. This approach goes far beyond the dance workshop delivery, therefore I began consultation with our existing group as to the appropriate marketing content (including how to describe and communicate the group's purpose, value and opportunities), the most effective communication channels for their age group and preferred imagery to convey who we are. Consulting with the existing group not only gave the young people a sense of ownership and responsibility, but also provided me with valuable information and insight in how best to connect with their peers.

Our key findings from this consultation were that a flyer is too big to hand out in school and business cards were preferred, and that Instagram was the most effective social media communication channel to reach their age range. From this, I did a re-design and print of marketing materials and also used the Rural Steps budget to commission a promotional film. To produce what we needed, I contacted local filmmakers, following a recommendation, by phone and email and created a brief to be clear on what we wanted the end result to be.

Some difficulties I realised at this stage were that I rarely captured high quality images, especially of classes, as I am always delivering a session or preparing a group for a performance at an event. Without additional budgets it is difficult to get an external photographer to capture these, which are essential for strong marketing material. It is also time-consuming distributing print material to local venues, something to factor in, especially when establishing a new group.

The creation and launch of the promotional film had a good response on social media, effectively communicating who we are and what we are about, and created conversations about the group with members of the local community and schools. In producing this, I ensured that all parental consent for images and film covered use for promotional purposes. I feel this was a great resource to produce as it truly captures the real content of class and I feel optimistic about its ability to further promote the group in the future.

## INCREASE PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Rural Steps supported us in covering participation and travel costs to enable dancers to attend performance and development opportunities in the wider region, which would otherwise be difficult to access due to poor transport links and additional expenses. From my own experience as a young person, and now as a Dance Artist, some of the most memorable and impactful opportunities have been and are attending larger events to connect and create with peers from across the region, be exposed to inspiring performance work and experience new approaches from other Professional Artists.

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As the group were already established, the next step for them was to start producing performance work to a higher standard in order to access bigger platforms and performance opportunities. Before Rural Steps, Ingleton Youth Dance had been involved in some local performance events such as Big Up North, Yorkshire Schools Dance Festival and the Blue Moose Showcase but were able to extend their profile and experiences at these events and reach new platforms as a result of the project. In Spring 2020, in our third year of applying for the On Stage performance strand of the UDance platform at The Lowry, Salford, the group were successful for the first time in their application! This was a huge achievement for the group, a big confidence boost and recognition for the commitment and development over the previous four years which led to them being invited to a regional platform and national stage. In the previous two years, the group had been selected for the Choreographic Development strand of the platform instead. Participating in this allowed the group to watch performance work by other Youth Dance Companies which was aspirational for the group, alongside taking part in workshops and receiving choreographic feedback from their peers and other Professionals which was invaluable to their development. Being selected for the On Stage strand took this to the next level.

We chose to begin to make contact with other Youth Dance Companies to build valuable future partnerships by connecting with other Youth Dance Artists at events and on social media. This allowed me to gain insight, ideas and development for my own delivery in Youth Dance, whilst also looking to create shared projects in which our young people could work together, providing them with varied and collaborative dance experiences. Partnering with other Youth Dance Companies for specific projects also poses a benefit in being able to apply for and source joint funding to help make ideas a reality.



Image Credit: Film on the Brain



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## REFLECTION AND THE FUTURE

Being part of this project has enabled us to explore and implement new ways of supporting and sustaining this provision for the future, whilst providing access to inspiring and aspirational performance opportunities for the dancers and supporting their weekly provision. The group are now a firmly established company of young dancers with recognition at Youth Dance Platforms across the wider region.

Since the involvement in Rural Steps, I have seen Ingleton Youth Dance participants develop a strong sense of team and identity as a company of young dancers. I have seen significant progression in their confidence and performance skills which has been rewarded in the opportunities they have successfully applied for. I have seen the dancers become increasingly confident in offering choreographic suggestions and feedback in the development of performance work which ensures the piece remains a true representation of them as individuals and as a group, whilst generating a strong sense of ownership over the work.

Through participant fees, and support from the Blue Moose family, delivering Ingleton Youth Dance weekly sessions remains relatively sustainable. However, we still face the challenge of securing regular funding to support access to additional performance and development opportunities with other Youth Dance Companies and Professional Artists across the region which are invaluable to the dancers, allowing them to expand their experience and knowledge of the wider Arts sector.

Looking to the future, I hope to use the resources developed during Rural Steps to successfully fund a 'Schools Tour' to share the group's achievements to a wider audience of their peers, develop leadership skills through sharing their experience, and create aspirational opportunities for other young people. I hope for continued growth in the company with new participants joining and look to continue to develop high quality, youth-led performance work which develops dancers as both individuals and artists. I hope we can establish further links with other Youth Dance Companies (especially other rural groups) to share experiences and broaden the dancers' outlook.

*"I like learning new phrases. I also like the way that Zanna changes movements to suit every person's strengths. I love how everyone can add their moves in a dance."*

- Ingleton Youth Dance participant