



## **Breathe:** **A Dance Programme for Patients with Respiratory Conditions**



**Evaluation Report by:**  
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## **Introduction**

The Arts for Health team at Alder Hey have worked in partnership with Merseyside Dance Initiative (MDI) since 2006, through our innovative Cultural Champions programme. Together, we have developed a number of dance and movement programmes which have been about supporting patients, through developing their confidence, coordination, stamina and self-esteem.

Breathe was a programme developed by Merseyside Dance Initiative in 2012, and run across several Trusts within Merseyside, Alder Hey being the only paediatric hospital to take part. The project was supported by Asthma UK and funded by Liverpool Primary Care Trust. Its aim was to specifically support patients with chronic asthma and other respiratory conditions, by introducing gentle dance and movement exercises, posture and relaxation techniques, and giving patients the confidence to take part in exercise in a supported environment. The programme here at Alder Hey was therefore a collaboration between the Asthma Nurse Specialists, Arts for Health and Merseyside Dance Initiative, and in part responded to a need from many families for a programme that was non-clinical, sociable and participatory.

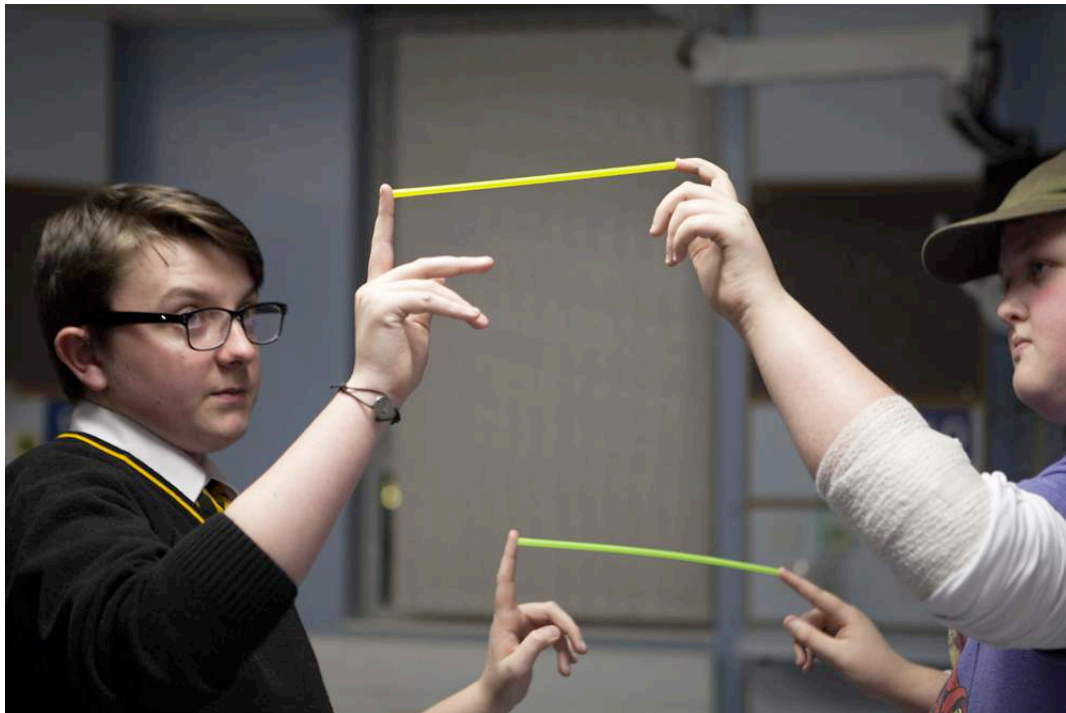
Given the huge success of the first programme run at Alder Hey between January and March 2013, all participating organisations felt that it would be extremely beneficial to develop the programme again and reach new patients, and to measure the impact of the programme upon the children and young people taking part. Early indications showed that there was some improvement in lung function which may have been due to taking part in Breathe.

The new programme had the following aims:

- To improve asthma control in the identified group of children and young people by supporting them to take part in gentle dance and movement exercises.
- To improve quality of life for participating children and young people. It is recognised that exercise and breathing exercises can improve health and the quality life. (Holloway L, Ram FSF, 2001)

The programme had the following objectives:

- Facilitate a supportive environment for participating in exercise/movement.
- Increase exercise tolerance.
- Increase confidence and improve self-esteem.
- Develop understanding of the importance of breathing techniques.



**Identifying the participants**

Patients who are known to the Asthma Nurse Specialists, and have either poorly controlled asthma or are on the Difficult to Control Asthma pathway, were invited to take part in the project. All patients were on step 3 or above of the British Thoracic Society (BTS) Guidelines for Asthma. Many patients were on step 5 of the BTS guidelines and still had troublesome symptoms, preventing them from taking part in exercise, especially PE at school. Their symptoms led to school absence and in some patients low self-esteem, difficulty in making friends and participating in normal school life/activity.

Participants ranged from 6 to 14 years in age.



## **The Project**

Participants attended a 12 week course of sessions. Each session was held at Alder Hey Hospital on the direct admissions unit every Wednesday after school for 1 hour. Each session was supported by the Asthma Nurse Specialists, providing assessment and advice prior and during each session.

The Dance Artist, Maxine Brown from MDI, engaged the group in various exercises, movement and breathing techniques to popular music, including dance with different cultural influences. Group activities, for example, using a large parachute, helped break the ice amongst participants and encouraged interaction often leading to friendships.

Parents/carers were invited to stay during the session time in an adjacent area to the group. Tea/coffee and biscuits were provided and parents/carers were encouraged to engage with one another, also supported by the Asthma Nurse Specialists.

Participants performed Spirometry as part of their assessment at the start and end of the project. This enabled the Asthma Nurses to assess asthma control and support patients with appropriate advice/medication to be able to participate in the sessions. Participants and Parents/Carers completed the Asthma Control Test (ACT) (Nathan RA et al, 2004), a quality of life questionnaire, at the beginning of the project, halfway through and also at the end of the project. Evaluation questionnaires were also completed by participants and Parents/Carers.

## **Outcomes**

The Project was well attended with over 6 participants at 9 out of the 12 sessions. Parents/Carers and participants showed an admirable commitment to attending the sessions, organising transport and other family/personal commitments in order for their child to attend.

Spirometry results indicate improvement in lung function for some patients. This is particularly significant at this time of year as the winter period is almost certainly the most problematic time of year for this group of patients with increased symptoms, increased rescue medication, A&E attendances, hospital admissions and school absence due to difficult asthma symptoms.

Asthma Control Test (ACT) scores indicate improvement in quality of life in a small number of the participants. However, numbers completing the ACT questionnaire at the end of the project were less due to reduced attendance at the last session. Those participants and parents/carers whose ACT scores were lower at the end of the session still reported lots of benefit to attending the Project in their evaluation form answers/comments, some of which are documented below.

Responses to the questions on the evaluation forms were very indicative and supportive of the overall success of the project. Of the 20 forms completed over the period of the Project, all answered "Yes" to the question "Did you enjoy the sessions?"

### **Comments from Young person's evaluation forms**

**In response to the question: 'What did you like best about the sessions?'**

"Learning how to control my asthma a better way"

"Gained confidence and enjoyed the activities"

"Different to normal activities"

"It's fun"

"Dancing to the music"

"Breathing exercises"

“Meeting new people”

“All the different dances”

### **Comments from Parents evaluation forms**

**In response to the question:** *‘What did you like best about the sessions?’*

“The instructor”

“Controlled environment, she enjoyed it so much”

“Joining in with other children who understand her condition”

“E getting some exercise, meeting new children and gaining in confidence”

“Exercising in a safe controlled environment”

“The variety of dances available”

“The dancing and the chance to meet children with the same problems as he has. Increased confidence”

“I have liked the interaction with different parents, and G has enjoyed the different styles of dancing”

“To watch my child have freedom to move/dance with other asthmatics”

“J enjoys the dancing”

**In response to the question:** *‘Did you like the opportunity to meet other parents and did you find this supportive?’*

“Yes, that was helpful”

“Very much so, support from other parents is very beneficial”

“Yes, enjoyed chatting and learning how other parents cope with asthma”

“Yes, it was really nice to meet other parents who understood what it was like caring for a child with asthma”

**In response to the question:** *‘Did the sessions help improve your child’s asthma?’*

“Really helped to know we could have contact with asthma professionals when H is struggling- rather than having to go back to GP”

“Wonderful to know H could have lung function test before session when he had been poorly. Felt supported”.



## References

Holloway L, Ram FSF, 2001) *Breathing exercises for asthma (Cochrane review)*. In: *The Cochrane library issue 3 2001*. London: John Wiley & sons.

Nathan RA et al J Allergy Clinical Immunology. 2004; 113: 59-65

British Thoracic Society/Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (BTS/SIGN) (2012). British Guideline on the Management of Asthma: A national clinical guideline.



Photography by Leila Romaya and Paul McCann

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