

## Shall We Dance: Invitation and Exploration

For as long as I can remember, I have loved the art of dance. One of my earliest memories is attending Ballet in the Park. After that experience I fell in love with ballet and everything about it; the beauty, grace, precision, emotive stories and the way a body could speak without uttering a single word. I dreamed of becoming a ballerina and for a short time, I was indulged with dance lessons to honour this desire. When I became blind, I thought this dream could no longer become a reality. I had lost everything connected to dance: not just performing, but the pleasure of experiencing its spectacle. As with so many things I thought blindness had taken from me, I assumed the world of dance was gone forever. This was not the case, however. As a blind artist I re-entered this world and learned that dance was accessible to me as both a dancer and an observer, capable of appreciating dance in all its subtlety and richness. Beyond these roles, I have been invited to join the dance in a new way, as an active community builder. Through a consultative and collaborative process, we artists explore the intersections of dance and disability, examining where exclusion occurs and how dance can become more inclusive and accessible.

## Decolonizing Dance

Racialized people and those with the lived experience of disability are often compelled to fit into a world that is neither created for them nor facilitates

their success as they move within it. The reflexive challenge that these communities constantly face is to learn how to exist in the world, while at the same time finding strategies to resist the societal expectations and limitations imposed upon them. Once the boundaries are known and understood, they can be transgressed. Recognizing what the world deems achievable as determined by ableist mentality, we as artists interrogate these preconceived notions to create what we know is attainable. We live within invisible boundaries because society defines our limitations. This becomes the world we build for ourselves until someone presents an alternative path and invites us to imagine new ways of existing, creating, and sharing art.

This work does not happen in isolation. It requires the support of community- building collaborators to bring the vision to life and make the dream a reality. A dream may reveal what is possible, but not yet how it will take shape. The role of the Artists in this process is to translate ideas into practical and tangible forms, articulating them in ways that can be experienced rather than imagined. Through exploration and experimentation, the boundaries of accessibility are redefined, and the work can, in fact, achieve what it set out to make possible.

## Dance Partners

If the next step is collaboration, what does this mean? It means moving beyond eliminating competition and providing support to build communities where we can help each other to heal and to experience joy. Furthermore, it means abandoning accepted ideas that re-enforce practices of exclusion rather than inclusion. To move beyond exclusion, we must ask how dance can be articulated. Speaking dance into being occurs through practices that let dance travel beyond sight, allowing movement to be imagined. Indeed, listening to an audio-described performance is, in itself, a kind of dance.

The describer becomes a partner, guiding the audience through the unfolding story. Trust is placed in them; with the assurance they will offer the information needed to follow where the performance leads. They are disembodied dancers, their words demonstrating both artistry and dexterity. The describer must hold the frame of the action, not with their body, but with language that enhances the audience's understanding as they weave their way through the performance. Just as they are a guide for the audience, the audio describer is also a dance partner for the dancer. To have others translate the work and share their interpretation is to dance with the dancer and participate in an exchange where meaning is moved between bodies. These acts of interpretation and articulation invite the presence of another partner, expanding the dance to include someone new. Preserving the essence of dance, its fluidity, rhythm, and poetic movement through spoken words is the dance that is choreographed.