

Pilot Dance! with F|Fort: The Story of Dance as Mental and Physical Support for Young Adults with and after Cancer

Introduction

Shortly before her passing, Floor van Liemt (1997-2021), founder of the F|Fort Foundation, expressed her wish that the next art project of F|Fort would be focused on dance. She believed that dance was a unique art form that could contribute to both mental and physical well-being of young adults with and after cancer (AYAs - Adolescents & Young Adults). For her, dance was a way to rebuild confidence in a body damaged by cancer and to strengthen the connection between the body and emotions.

For this project, F|Fort partnered with Scapino Ballet Rotterdam. Between September 2023 and February 2024, 17 AYAs, referred to as 'dancers' during the project, worked under the guidance of former Scapino dancers Annemarie Labinjo-van der Meulen and Bryndis Ragna Brynjolfsdottir to create their own dance performance, inspired by repertoire of Scapino. On the 10th of February 2024, the performance Let Me Dance Again! was staged in front of a sold-out theatre in Schiedam. Friends, family, and invited guests witnessed a co-creation in which dance expressed what it means to have cancer at a young age. Pain and sadness were made visible and tangible, but so too were the beauty and gratitude for life. The performance also highlighted the resilience and strength gained when peers create art together.

"It's incredibly healing to reconnect with yourself and your body. It also takes away a large part of the loneliness." - dancer

The performance was also featured on the 9th of March 2024, at the international dance festival Schrit_tmacher in Heerlen, where the dancers performed for a new audience. A dedicated visitor to the festival commented, that they had never seen such a beautiful performance.

A documentary titled 'MAGICAL MOVEMENT' was created about the project, commissioned by F|Fort. Barbara Jonckheer and Nienke Elenbaas followed 3 of the 17 dancers individually to capture a more in-depth portrayal. The documentary premiered on the 20th of June 2024, at the LantarenVenster cinema in Rotterdam. It will be made available on request for the dancers, their loved ones, other AYAs, and for educational purposes in healthcare settings.



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Research

For this art project, F|Fort collaborated for the first time with Scapino Ballet Rotterdam, the oldest dance company in the Netherlands. Scapino was founded in 1945 with the mission to 'bring colour to the faces of children, paled by the war'. This drive to make an impact through dance remains at the core of Scapino's ethos. Scapino breathes dance, lives dance, and is dance - dancing for pleasure, striving to promote social cohesion and foster positive health. Scapino adheres to the philosophy of Machteld Huber from the *Institute for Positive Health* (IPH). Huber defines Positive Health as 'the ability to adapt and self-manage in the face of physical, emotional, and social challenges in life' (IPH, 2020). IPH takes a broad perspective on health, focusing not on the (absence of) illness but on the self, resilience, and having a sense of purpose in life. Health is often associated with well-being, meaning that a person is thriving physically, mentally, and socially. Scapino recognises that dance can have a profound impact within this broad view of positive health, which comprises six dimensions: bodily functions, mental well-being, meaning in life, quality of life, social participation, and daily functioning (IPH, 2020). In connection to dance and health, the International Association for Dance Medicine and Science (IADMS, 2021) has defined Dance for Health as

Dance for Health provides holistic, evidence-based activities for the individual to manage and adapt to physical, mental, and social health challenges.

In Dance for Health sessions, trained teaching artists engage people as dancers, rather than patients, in joyful, interactive, artistic practice.

These principles were also embraced in the project Dance! with F|Fort.

Because F|Fort wanted to determine whether Floor's hypothesis – that dance contributes to the well-being of AYAs – was correct, we, Alexa Gratama, chair of F|Fort, and Annemarie Labinjo-van der Meulen, project leader, initiated a pilot project. The pilot's goal was to collect qualitative data through questions and interviews that could support or refute Floor's hypothesis. The decision to document the project in a short film was driven by the desire to investigate and validate the impact of the project. Questions we focused on during the project included: What is the connection with your body, your mind, and your emotions? Do you have control over that, or not? What does dancing mean to you as a young person who has received a cancer diagnosis? We were also curious about how the project affects interpersonal connections and what being together with peers means for well-being.

After the performance on the 9th March, 2024, in-depth interviews were conducted with the dancers via Teams by Alexa. This article is the result of those interviews and will be made available through both the websites of the F|Fort Foundation and Scapino Ballet Rotterdam, LinkedIn, and direct email to professionals involved in the care of AYAs.

Research Group

A total of 17 AYAs participated in the project. This group consists of women aged 22 to 39 who signed up in response to a call via social media. The group is diverse in several respects: they have different diagnoses and are at various stages of their treatment and clinical perspectives. Some have completed their treatment several years ago, while others have recently finished, and some are still in the midst of their treatment journey. Experience with dance was not a requirement for participation;

some dancers have danced their whole lives, while for others, this was their first introduction to dance. Not all dancers were present at every workshop.

Project Structure

Annemarie Labinjo-van der Meulen and Bryndis Ragna Brynjolfsdottir both studied at ArteZ University of the Arts, danced for years with Scapino, and served as dance facilitators during this project. Annemarie has 12 years of experience in dance and health, working with individuals with chronic and neurological conditions. She is a Master Coach and Behaviour Analyst (MSc). Bryndis holds a Bachelor of Arts in photography, and with her background as a dancer, she combines these two art forms in projects that emphasize the importance of the body and mind.

In preparing for this project, they consulted experts in the oncology field and integrated their insights into the program. Julia Monning, a psychosomatic physiotherapist specialising in psychosocial issues related to cancer, was involved in the background, and the methodology of Emily Jenkins, founder of Move Dance Feel, Dance in Cancer Care was applied (Move Dance Feel). The project consisted of 13 workshops held in the studios of Scapino Ballet Rotterdam. The workshops took place every Saturday from 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM and concluded with a communal lunch. Participation was free of charge.

During the initial workshops, the focus was on movement, letting go, feeling, and connecting with one another. This was achieved by providing *tools* and input (external to internal). Subsequently, the process was explored more deeply, shifting the focus towards intuitive movement (internal to external). Breathwork played an important role. In the following workshops, the participants gradually progressed towards the performance, with the creative contributions of the dancers taking centre

stage. What story did they want to tell together, and how could that be accomplished? Inspired by the performance 'Oscar', which revolves around the life of Oscar Carré and themes such as imagination, thinking in possibilities, and innovation, the dancers engaged in rich associations. This process began on paper and then transitioned into movement. Each workshop started and ended with a check-in on individual well-being. While the workshops were a dynamic process, there was always space for individual tempo and personal feelings. The studio became a safe place, where personal boundaries could be respected and experiences shared. To record their experiences and feelings, all dancers received a notebook. Some utilised it well, while others hardly used it at all.



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The Experiences

In the in-depth interviews regarding their mental and physical well-being, the dancers – 13 out of the 17 dancers who participated in the interview round – were asked the following questions:

- 1. What can you share about the difference between before the dance project started and after it concluded?*
- 2. If you had to choose one thing (a feeling, an experience, a development, an insight), what has the project given you?*
- 3. What would you like to share about this project with your peers?*
- 4. What would you like to share about this project with healthcare providers?*

This article summarises the responses from the interviewed dancers. It should be noted that their answers generally aligned closely with one another, and there were no significantly differing responses. For the sake of brevity and readability, choices have been made that, in the authors' opinion, do not detract from the significance and importance of the pilot. All responses have been recorded, and archived, and can be reviewed in the appendices. All dancers have given their consent for the use of the data obtained.

Without exception, the dancers reported that participating in the project contributed positively to their mental and physical well-being. Compared to their situation before the project, they all noted an improved connection with their bodies, in the sense that they can now feel – and understand – how their bodies are doing. They also gained insight into how the body stores emotions, of which ‘the mind’, is not always aware

and that these can be released and addressed, either completely or partially, through movement.

In *De emotie verbeeld*, Van Meel (1989) writes that art makes it possible 'to express the most hidden emotions, thus freeing us from them and helping us to seek a new emotional balance' (Van Meel, 1989, p. 13). Not only was the act of dancing itself experienced as healing, but also the act of dancing in a group of peers. Some participants had prior experience with peer support (other cancer patients and/or AYAs), while for others, this was a new experience. Without exception, they emphasised the significance of being together – more importantly, doing something together – with peers who understand what they have been through and are going through, as incredibly supportive. Research by Butler et al. (2015) demonstrates that creative ownership within a dance project for people with cancer not only fosters a sense of belonging but also creates a natural mutual support through the sharing of similar experiences (Butler et al., 2015, p. 4). Additionally, research by Jenkins & Wakeling (2020) indicates that dancing in a group of peers reduces stress and anxiety while promoting positive emotions such as joy, often accompanied by a 'sense of release' (Jenkins & Wakeling, 2020, p. 250). Because the creative process allows for expression, some dancers felt they were overcoming challenges in their lives. Jenkins & Wakeling (2020) also found that artistic challenges during dance sessions enabled some participants to 'overcome challenges in other domains of their lives to great effect' (Jenkins & Wakeling, 2020, p. 250).

Both the experiences of the dancers in this pilot and supporting research demonstrate that dance not only contributes to physical and mental health but also has a profound impact on feelings of connection and emotional processing. The notion that art, in its

broadest sense, can be beneficial for health is also highlighted in a report by the World Health Organization (Fancourt & Finn, 2019).



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Here are the dancers' stories, rewritten in their own words, illustrating how participation in the project has influenced their lives (for all responses, see Appendix A).

1. What can you share about the difference between before the dance project started and after it concluded?

During the project, one dancer became more in touch with her feelings. As a result, she learned to listen to herself better and became more aware of her breathing. The dance studio became a 'happy place' where she could be herself. The harsh voice of 'it should be over by now!' and the denial of fear and sadness made way for softness towards herself, physical liberation, and trust, thanks to the support from others, including the dance facilitators.

Another dancer developed a better understanding of how her body works, which provided her with more emotional space and calm. Previously, she only dared to express her emotions when she was alone in the car, but now she was able to express these emotions in the presence of others. This shift also influenced her relationship with her social environment: the mindset of 'bring it on!' is new for her. Before the project, her illness had led to a low sense of self-worth, but she now realised that the illness had brought her something good, despite the loss of being carefree.

The treatment for one dancer had just concluded, and her recovery was still in progress. In spite of her always cheerful demeanour, she found herself questioning why she wasn't crying. Emotions surfaced during the song 'Let me dance again!', composed and sung by one of the dancers during the project. This song is about vulnerability and hope when you have or have had cancer (link to Spotify in Appendix B). While she was in the midst of processing everything, she appreciated being with others who understood 'it'.



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By asking questions like 'What do I actually need, and what does my body say about that?', another dancer gained more tools. Dance and movement guided her to face cancer without fear. She discovered the strength to overcome panic, knowing that, at her core, she is okay.

For another dancer, the connection began not with sharing stories, but with physical togetherness, making the distance feel smaller than it did with 'normal' people.

Opening up became easier due to the support she felt. Her loneliness had previously been so overwhelming that it was unbearable. While 'healed' might be a strong word, at one point, loneliness no longer took centre stage. Physically, the project felt like a celebration; although she had practiced yoga and free dancing, it had always been with 'healthy' people. This project provided her with a tribal sense of home, where understanding and support could be found.

For another dancer, releasing emotions through movement was a physical sensation. Talking had suppressed much out of fear of losing control: 'But with dancing, you let it go. Your trauma comes to the surface from the deepest part of you. You allow the trauma in and let it out. It feels really good to release those emotions.'

2. If you had to choose one thing (a feeling, an experience, a development, an insight), what has the project given you?

Keywords that described the dancers' experiences included: *connection, self-confidence, connection without words, relief, resilience, rest, peace, softness, friendship, strength and openness*. Here is a selection of their answers (for all answers, see Appendix C).

Self-Confidence

Initially, one dancer felt tense and everything seemed stiff. However, over time, her emotions began to flow. She never expected that dance could bring about such a change. The quick connection with the other dancers, whom she did not know before the project, was an unexpected and special experience. She learned that everyone fights their own battles and realised how important the people around her are, as well as love. She now understands her own strength. 'Being able to participate in the final performance', despite undergoing treatment during the project, has given her self-confidence an enormous boost.

Connection Without Words

Another dancer appreciated the opportunity to express emotions through dance without using words, connecting with her peers in this way. This made her feel less alone. She experienced a deeper connection through glances and touches, discovering that movement was a new language that allowed her emotions to simply 'be'. The collective process with the entire group enhanced this experience.

Self-Awareness

For one dancer, her stomach had become a 'black spot'. While dancing, she focused extra attention on this area and discovered that it held a lot of sadness. Although she had always danced, she feared she would no longer be good enough. In this space, it was okay to make mistakes, and she learned that it was logical to have emotions.

Strength

A younger dancer learned that her feelings of weakness and shame were normal and that they were valid. The project provided her with the space to express her emotions and to make visible what had previously been invisible.



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Question 3. What would you like to tell your peers about this project?

All the dancers want to convey the same message to other AYAs: 'Join in if you get the chance!' The immediacy of the experience is appealing and provides support.

Here are some quotes from the dancers (for all quotes, see Appendix D):

"Wherever you are in your story, whether you are in remission or in the palliative phase, this is relevant, and you deserve to give yourself this opportunity."

"If you are open to it, this is a very good way of processing trauma. You really come out stronger."

"You don't have to solve everything alone or seek help from outside. It's great to work on recovery with people who understand the same feelings. Everyone's abilities were considered, and there was a solution for everything."

The intention of F|Fort and Scapino is to share the knowledge gained from this pilot with other interested parties so that similar projects can potentially be realised. We hope to create opportunities for AYAs to dance in various locations across the Netherlands. For some dancers, the travel time was a downside (ranging from 1 to 4 hours).

Question 4. What would you like to tell healthcare providers about this project?

The main message from all the dancers to healthcare providers is clear: prepare AYAs for the fact that the hardest part begins only after treatment in the hospital is completed, and guide them towards options for support. During treatment, everything revolves around survival. It's only at home – or back with your parents – that the real work begins. Being mentally prepared for this and being somewhat informed about therapies, peer support, and other assistance options is incredibly helpful. Ensure that there is a contact person whom the AYA can rely on. Here are some quotes from the dancers (for all quotes, see Appendix E):

"I have a doctor's perspective myself. The medical aspect is crucial, but for mental health, you need to point out where to find this kind of support. Ensure that physical and/or creative activities are part of your referral options, not just the psychologist. Movement makes the mind work differently. You resonate on a different wavelength in relation to your feelings. You start to feel what your mind has been suppressing."

"My own oncologist was very good, but we both struggled with the question: where does his work end? They need to know that you're searching. You need guidance towards appropriate

aftercare. Who helps you get started after the treatment phase?

Outside the hospital, no one is waiting for you. You seek a central point of contact.”

“My doctor was in the audience during the performance. She said, ‘You understand much better what you are dealing with by seeing the performance. Watch the documentary: this is what happens outside the Consultation Room!”

Conclusion

The dance project by F|Fort and Scapino demonstrates that dance, as an art form, can be a valuable addition to traditional care for AYAs. Throughout the project, it provided the dancers with a sense of unity, self-confidence, and the space to express and process emotions, both individually and collectively. The connection between the body, mind, and emotions, enhanced by peer support, proved relevant for the healing process and contributed to their mental and physical well-being. The documentary ‘MAGICAL MOVEMENT’ will further disseminate these insights and hopefully inspire more AYAs and healthcare providers to integrate dance into the recovery process during and after cancer.

The results of this project confirm Floor's hypothesis. To further substantiate these findings, scientific research is needed. This way, Floor's hypothesis can not only be positioned within the scientific literature but also find practical application in projects aimed at improving the mental and physical well-being of AYAs through dance.



Foto Martijn Kappers

The F|Fort Foundation extends its heartfelt thanks to Scapino Ballet Rotterdam and all its donors for making this project possible. We also express our gratitude to Barbara Jonckheer and Nienke Elenbaas for their important work in creating the documentary 'Magical movement.'

Art for Strength, depicting the unspeakable. This is what the F|Fort Foundation stands for.

Alexa Gratama - Chair, F|Fort Foundation

Annemarie Labinjo-van der Meulen - Project Leader

1st of October 2024

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APPENDIX A

1. What can you say about the difference between before the start of the dance project and after its completion?

"I thought I had processed everything, but there's still a lot in my body. It's great that it has come out."

"Moving is a different way of processing than talking. The tension is released differently than when you talk. The tears just came, already in session 2, lying on the mat, and then the music hit me. It's nice when the body solves it; you don't always need to know exactly why you're sad."

"I feel more whole now, I can feel better in my body how I truly feel. It did something to my self-confidence. You realise your body can really do something again. It also brings more peace because you feel in time how you're feeling, which means you push your limits less."

"Through the workshops, I've started to feel much more. I'm listening to myself better and have become more aware of my breathing. The studio was a happy place to be with myself. I allowed myself this time. I often struggled with negative voices: 'It can be over now!' I gave no space to my fear and sadness. Now, I'm gentler with myself. The liberation is also physical. That also comes from the trust of the others and Annemarie and Bryndis."

"I've become kinder to myself. I used to struggle a lot with tension complaints. It's hard to find words for all those emotions. This was very casual, moving instead of talking."

"Now I know much better how to push myself. I understand my body better. This creates more emotional space and more peace. I also feel less closed off; before, I only allowed emotions to come out when I was alone in my car. Thanks to the group, I can now let it happen in the company of others too. This also influences how I relate to my social environment: bring it on! Before the project, due to the illness, I had little self-esteem. Now I see that it's not something bad to have experienced, something good has also come from it. Although I've lost my carefreeness."

"I have more tools now. What do I really need, what is my body telling me? Dance, movement shows you the way. I'm no longer afraid to face cancer. There's so much strength in me. Panic can still take over, but at the core, I'm okay."

"I can do more than I expected. There's also more softness and feeling. I feel more connected to my body. I'm also less overwhelmed by emotions."

"I've taken a big step forward in the journey I was already on. Maybe I'm even done now. My illness is long behind me. I lived for a while as if I had never been sick, but 2-3 years ago sleep problems started, intense emotional outbursts, I didn't feel good. I had therapy for this at the Helen Downing Institute, but I still didn't dare to use all the tools I got there. Dancing helped me express myself in a different way. It contributed to the acknowledgement that there's a part you carry with you, that cancer is a part of me. Showing this in the performance was exciting. My friends don't know this, they know me from after the cancer. The connection with peers was so helpful, it helped me 'come out of the closet'. After the performance, we talked a lot in my family as well, while we normally don't talk much about emotions."

"I definitely notice a difference, if only from the lovely people, the connection with peers. From what we've accomplished together. Cancer wasn't the main subject because we were there to dance. I've regained the joy of dancing."

"I thought I had processed everything, I had been in remission for almost 4 years. But it came right back. I never thought that sadness gets stored in your body. I was always very open about my illness, I'm a writer by trade, so I could articulate it well, I even blogged about it. But all those hidden emotions came out. It led to a piece of processing I didn't know I needed. It's great that there's something different with dance than talking. With dance, it suddenly comes out of nowhere. You're there with peers, all beautiful women with a huge backpack of experiences. That's moving. The tears just flow. Sometimes you forget that you were sick. I was 22. Then suddenly there's sadness about everything that happened. Here, that was all allowed."

"My treatment had just ended, I was still in recovery. I was always very cheerful, even at the start of the project. Why am I not crying, I wondered. The emotions were released the first time Laura sang her song. I'm still in the middle of my processing, but I found it very nice to be with others who understand."

"We didn't start by telling stories but by being physically together. You feel less distance than with 'normal' people because you know this has a place. You can open up more easily because you feel supported. My loneliness was so strong that it was unbearable. Healed may be a big word, but loneliness is no longer at the forefront. Physically, it was really a celebration, I already did yoga and free dance, but that was with healthy people. This project brought together my need for physical connection; it was tribal, a feeling of home, here I am understood."

"It was a physical sensation that emotions are released through movement. Normally, you talk about it, but then you suppress a lot, you don't want to lose control. But with dancing, you let go. Then your trauma rises from the deepest part. You allow the trauma in and release it. It feels really good to let the emotions go."

APPENDIX B

Number Let me dance again!/ Laat me weer dansen! - Laura Hoogendoorn

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2iIAMIMjrUzEuoQwMF4biZ?si=e9361943c67f440f>

APPENDIX C

2. *If you had to choose one thing (a feeling, an experience, a development, an insight), what has the project given you?*

"*Connection* – A better connection with my body, but also with the women, the peer support. The nicest part was that we all love dancing. Then there is no emphasis on being sick."

"*Self-confidence* – At the beginning, I was so tense; everything was stiff and locked up. When that was released, the emotions came too. I knew about the tension, but to feel it like that was surreal. I didn't expect dance to trigger that. It was also very special to connect so quickly with the other dancers, who were strangers. You never know what someone else is going through, that's what I learned. What's important? The people around me, and love. I now realise how strong I am, and how fast I recovered from the TIL treatment I went through during the project. The fact that I made it to the final performance."

"*Connection* – With my body and with peers. That makes it feel less lonely. I did oncological rehabilitation, but those were mainly talk groups about managing lower energy levels, for example. It's so nice to have no words, just emotions. A glance or a touch, that's a much deeper level of connection. Movement is a new kind of language. You can let whatever is there be there. Plus, you were with the whole group in a process."

"*Relief* – I always felt something heavy, I was struggling, wondering if this belonged to me. Through dancing, I became kinder to myself, less strict, and that feels light, more relaxed, and more air. After three lessons, I heard mostly the high notes in the

music, whereas before I only heard the heavy ones. I saw myself as light in a visualisation."

"*Resilience* – I mean emotional resilience. I feel a bit of recovery now instead of staying stuck. I stand stronger now. I was always aware of the tension in my body, but I ignored it. Now I couldn't. Words don't always describe what you feel. Now it came out in a different way. The body moves ahead of the mind. There's no distance between me and my body anymore. And that's not scary."

"*Peace* – In my mind, there were always 16 tabs open at once. That chaos has now lessened, and it's okay for it to be there. I now confront emotions and thoughts, so they are less disruptive. Not running away, but being kinder to myself. We showed each other the way in this. We tell the other person that they should be kinder to themselves, but how am I being with myself?"

"*Self-awareness* – Before the project, my stomach was a black hole for me. I didn't touch it, didn't do anything with it. During dancing, I gave it extra attention. I've always danced a lot, but I didn't dare to anymore; I wanted to do it right and was afraid I couldn't anymore. Here, it didn't matter if it didn't work out. In a healthy group, I'm also afraid of emotions. I've learned that it's completely logical to have emotions. You learn to feel better where that sadness sits. When I touched my stomach, I thought: yes, there's so much sadness there."

"*Softness* – I've become much softer towards myself. My partner and even my supervisors at work have noticed. They really picked up on it."

"*Connection* – I don't make friends quickly, and I don't really feel the need for it, but with the others in the group, there was real contact. I miss them too. There's also more connection with myself; I'm still close to my feelings."

"*Opening* – I had closed a door that shouldn't have been closed yet. I wasn't done processing. That door is open again. I've realised that the sadness and anger are still allowed to be there, even four years later. It was my strict voice, and maybe also the people further removed from me: 'It's been so long!' I thought so too. But it never goes away. Others in the group had the same, and I learned from them that it's okay. Dancing is the way to discover what's still there. It's okay to have a good cry. I now know: when I feel restless, I need to move a little, and I notice that helps."

"*Rest* – It was nice, those reflections with people who don't need words because explaining is so exhausting. It also contributed to further acceptance. It's been five years, but sometimes it still feels like yesterday. Everything happened so quickly at the time. I went through it all at such a breakneck speed."

"*Friendship* – I came to the project completely alone. I was one of the youngest. It was really nice to be able to talk about it with peers."

"*Strength* – I felt weak, I also felt ashamed. Now I'm doing much better. I know now that it's allowed to be there, it's not strange, and it's part of being human. I was always focused on keeping things pleasant, making sure I didn't make it hard for those around me. It was wonderful to have space for this. It used to be singular for me, individual suffering, but now we've created something that can be shown to everyone. That makes it visible to others."

APPENDIX D

Question 3. What would you like to share about this project with your peers?

- *"Participating adds value to the rest of your life."*
- *"If you're open to it, it's a really effective way of processing trauma. You truly come out stronger."*
- *"In everyday life, it's hard to make space, but that's really important. Peer support can also provide a lot. It makes you feel less alone."*
- *"I would recommend this to everyone. It has to suit you, but at every level, you'll get something out of it."*
- *"Go for it, it's a great addition to your recovery process. I've been looking for something like this before, but I couldn't find it. In therapy, the focus is on recovery, but here there's more room for everything to just be. It's not about results."*
- *"You don't have to solve everything on your own or with outside help. It's wonderful to work on recovery with people who understand the same feelings. Everyone's abilities were taken into account, and there was a solution for everything."*
- *"It's incredibly healing to reconnect with yourself and your body. It also removes a large sense of loneliness. I think every AYA needs this."*
- *"I didn't want to be with peers and had no interest in making a documentary, so I didn't expect it to give me so much. I wouldn't have been able to be so vulnerable in a regular dance group."*
- *"No matter where you are in your journey, whether you're in remission or in the palliative phase, this fits, and you should allow yourself something like this."*

- *"It's hopeful and motivating, whether you're participating in the performance or just watching it. My audience loved it; we made such an impact."*
- *"I encourage every AYA to try another form of therapy, like sports, dancing, music, or visual arts, in addition to talking. You unknowingly store up sadness, and it's good to do something with it because it affects your body."*
- *"I tell everyone about it, and that it's also a great way to work on your fitness. At first, I was exhausted, but you can do much more than you think. And it wasn't just about crying, we often had a lot of fun too."*
- *"Working on something together with peers is really wonderful. Give yourself the chance to dive into it. Creating something together also brings a huge sense of solidarity."*

APPENDIX E

Question 4. *What would you like to share about this project with healthcare providers?*

- *"Ensure there is attention to the difference between what happens in your body and what happens in your mind. These are not separate parts; there is interaction." My doctor was in the audience during the performance. She said, "You understand much better what you're dealing with by watching the performance. Watch the documentary: this is what happens outside the Consultation Room!"*
- *"There needs to be more awareness that after people are declared cancer-free, there is still so much involved in processing everything. It's not just 'Best wishes, see you at the check-up in six months.' AYA patients should receive brochures about these kinds of projects."*
- *"My own oncologist was very good, but we both struggled with: where does his work end? They need to know that you are searching for help. You need to be directed to appropriate aftercare. Who helps you get going after the treatment journey? No one is waiting for you outside the hospital. You are looking for a central point of contact."*
- *"For this group of intelligent women, feeling is much more important than talking."*
- *"Healthcare providers in the hospital must know that their work is very important, but it doesn't stop there. The aftermath is shortened when therapies like these are part of the total care trajectory."*
- *"When I got home, my child was at daycare and my husband was at work. I had to take it easy as advised by the doctor. But I thought: how do I get back?"*

- *"The black hole after treatment is so much darker than the treatment itself. You are left with your body and your thoughts, and you have nothing left. That is enormous. It is greatly underestimated. So you need to throw out lifelines earlier. The social worker assigned to me was terrible. She had no connection with our age group."*
- *"In the hospital, they are so focused on being sick and solving problems. I felt less seen as a person. This project shows that being sick affects you as a person in many ways; it's not over when you leave the hospital. Every AYA should have such a project as aftercare; a social worker is not enough."*
- *"I have a doctor's perspective myself. The medical aspect is the most important, but for the mental aspect, you need to point out where you can find this kind of support. Ensure that physical and/or creative activities are also part of your referral arsenal, not just psychologists. By moving, your mind works differently. You attune to your feelings in a different way. You start to feel what your mind has been hiding."*
- *"Tell them that peer contact is very healing."*
- *"There is more than just treatment and medication. There needs to be more attention to aftercare. I only get check-ups once a year for my hormonal therapy. That's it. I had to ask for rehabilitation therapy myself, but that stops after three months. AYAs are truly a different group of patients. Dance could be a permanent part of aftercare."*
- *"This kind of therapy should be covered by insurance. My oncologist was brilliant in her field, but emotional support wasn't part of her approach. Provide other support besides just a psychologist, because everyone has greatly benefited from*

dancing and the conversations among themselves. So much is organised for older adults, but for this group, it's really too little."