

---

## WHEELCHAIR DANCE SPORT

Submitting author: Mr Patrick McGeough  
The Wheelchair Dance Sport Association (UK),  
Watford, WD24 7RX  
United Kingdom

All authors: Patrick McGeough (corresp)

Type: Professional Practice  
Category: B: Disability and Paralympic Sport

### Abstract

Wheelchair Dance Sport and Wheelchair Dancing is a relatively unknown sport that is big in Europe and has only really been going since 2006 in the UK. We strive to enable disabled people to be as active as everyone else and show that everyone can dance regardless of their ability.

Disabled people in our experience have low expectations of what they can achieve. As well as facing barriers in the world practically and potential social exclusion, they may be in a process of physical rehabilitation and/or adapting to life as a new wheelchair user.

Wheelchair Dance is a very successful form of exercise which promotes better posture and balance within the wheelchair and increases spatial awareness and the correct use of the wheelchair in day to day life. By having a better posture, breathing increases in depth and duration, which leads on to improved digestion and metabolism. Music and dance is a wonderful tool to enhance mood and will give a burst of natural endorphins to aid in control of pain, and can unlock the minds of those with learning disabilities. We have seen this in action and we have a number of case studies to back this up: As you can see from the three examples Wheelchair Dance can be used as a rehabilitation tool to enable people to have more exercise in a fun environment through to just engaging disabled people and including them in to the activity the community is doing.

Recently one of the participants was asked for feedback on her experience of attending a weekly dance group and explained her difficulties as an older person after becoming a wheelchair user 3 years ago. She had found it difficult to manoeuvre around her accommodation even with widened doors and had to be careful not to bang her feet but attending the wheelchair dance sessions helped her adapt and become more confident as a new wheelchair user. Her improved spatial awareness from the dance sessions has transferred into her everyday life. Knock on effect in addition to the case studies to follow.

Chas: A man in his late 30s who came to a workshop in a large,

---

attendant operated power chair. The carer stated that if he stayed awake that meant that he was enjoying himself and the activity. He was partnered in several couple's dances and some group dancing and he was engaged and awake, and was enjoying the dancing. He has limited facial expression and no verbal communication that we observed. However, during a short break in the dancing, some other music was playing as background music. One piece, "Footloose" was played and this induced a dramatic change in Chas's behaviour. He became very animated and began to vocalise and move around in his wheelchair. The carer was very surprised and we actively began to use that piece of music in future classes to trigger this extra movement and awareness.

Kelly: A student at a special school in her teens. She was in a manual wheelchair that the carers propelled on her behalf. We were advised not to touch her as this would trigger either, biting, scratching or a spitting session from her. She was pushed in a couple of easy introduction dances and then whilst the instructor taught the next dance steps she was wheeled to the side of the floor. The music was played and the instructor disregarded the advice of the care staff and went over to Kelly and placing her hand of hers, asking her to dance as her partner. Kelly looked at the hand and then at the face of the instructor, who smiled and led her out onto the floor again. Despite the collective gasp from the care staff, nothing happened. She danced with the instructors hand on hers and then continued to dance with her and by the end of the session was actively holding the instructors hand. The care staff reported later that for several hours after the dance lesson, Kelly was calm and there were no incidents of previous violent behaviour.

Wheelchair Dance can enable more people to be active through seeing sport and dance coming together !

### **References**

WDSA (UK) working practice