



Libraries Connected & Oxygen Arts: Into the Light: Pioneers of Black British Ballet

Evaluation of touring exhibition & events programme

Sophie Ahmad, March 2026

"Overall, we were very happy with the programme and ... quality of the offer ... it stretched our marketing and content in new directions. We ... want to thank everyone involved wholeheartedly for the ... hard work we know this will have taken to make happen." (Library service)

"Not every day you get dance tuition from a ballet professional in a local library!" (Adult participant)

"Staff loved ... being able to interact with people viewing the exhibition. It provided a great talking point and introduction to the library." (Library service)

"My daughter has never tried ballet before, and this was a wonderful introduction. She was smiling and enthused all the way through ..." (Parent)

"There is no one else black in my ballet class, so I always felt different, but now I don't because there are other black dancers too." (Child participant aged 11-18)

"It was very inclusive ... It made me feel part of the local community, there were lots of different people there, all happy together." (Adult participant)

"The programme has significantly strengthened our partnerships across arts, media and community groups, creating new opportunities for collaboration, visibility and shared activity." (Library service)

"It made me realise ... how important libraries are to their communities and the benefits they can bring by opening their doors to events such as this ..." (Adult participant)

"It was a wonderful first ballet experience and I really enjoyed the Q and A which gave excellent insight into the process and the experience of the dancers." (Adult participant)

"When we all came up to the front and did some dancing, I really enjoyed it!" (Child participant aged 5-11)

"The programme has been received extremely positively, well beyond our expectations ... Feedback across the programme has been consistently enthusiastic ..." (Library service)

"I ... didn't know that libraries could put on such involved performance." (Adult participant)

"I really liked when we did the choreography. It was super, super fun!" (Child participant aged 5-11)

"It was a joy to listen to the panellists and learn about their experiences. I enjoy watching ballet but do not know much about it, so learnt a lot". (Adult participant)

"It's so unique and incredibly special that it is being offered to the library ... it's such a brilliant way to ... start conversations, raise awareness ... but in a really fun and exciting way ..." (Library service)

"This event has inspired me to keep pushing for what I want as not only is it possible, but it has been done before by others that look like myself." (Adult participant)

"None of this would have been developed ... without Libraries Connected being there to actually pull everything together and ... support it ..." (Library service)

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Introduction

About Libraries Connected, Oxygen Arts, & the Black British Ballet Project

Libraries Connected is an independent charity that supports, promotes, and represents public libraries. The organisation's work is driven by its membership, which includes almost every library service in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Crown Dependencies. Senior library leaders sit on the Libraries Connected Board, regional Advisory Committees, and four Universal Library Offer working groups. Libraries Connected was established in 1996 as the Society of Chief Librarians, changing its name in 2018 when it became an Arts Council England Sector Support Organisation and registered charity.

Oxygen Arts is a creative production agency and Community Interest Company that specialises in working with diverse communities. As a multi-disciplinary cultural producer, the organisation works across the performing arts, publishing, film, and photography to help communities to explore and share their stories. It also provides a range of services to help other organisations to reach new audiences and drive wider change within the creative industries.

One of Oxygen Arts' main strands of work is the Black British Ballet Project (BBBBP). The Project is based on the PhD research of Dr Sandie Bourne, a dancer, choreographer, and academic specialising in the historic under-representation of Black artists in British ballet institutions. The Project comprises a range of resources and activities, including a website that showcases the stories of pioneering Black dance professionals, a children's book (*Onisere and the Ballet Queen*), a Windrush-themed ballet show (*Island Movements*), and a feature-length documentary (*The Colour Barre*).

The origins of *Into the Light* & partners' goals for it

A central part of the work of Libraries Connected is developing and leading national projects to gather evidence, pilot new approaches, support the Universal Library Offers, and / or develop capacity and leadership across the public library sector. In 2024, staff from Oxygen Arts and heads of service on the Universal Library Offer working group on Culture and Creativity at Libraries Connected (notably Diane Fleet from Middlesbrough and Michelle Alford from Hull) began exploring the idea of a new offer for libraries based on the Black British Ballet Project. Keen to devise an accessible, flexible, offer that would work for libraries in a range of different contexts the partners decided to create a touring exhibition, around which a programme of other activity could be organised.

With support from staff at Libraries Connected, the partners put together a funding bid and were successful in being awarded £245,500 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to create *Into the Light: Pioneers of Black British Ballet*¹. This brought archive photography, articles, and images together with new video and audio interviews to create a groundbreaking exhibition, which opened in October 2024 and toured to 29 library services before closing at the end of 2025. The exhibition

¹ Libraries Connected and the Black British Ballet Project would like to thank the NLHF and National Lottery players for their kind support of this programme.

was accompanied by performances of *Island Movements*, and a programme of talks and workshops developed by Oxygen Arts in conversation with Libraries Connected and NLHF.

For Libraries Connected, *Into the Light* was an opportunity to bring a programme of cultural activity to libraries across the country, many of which may not have otherwise had the resources to get involved in an initiative of this kind. It was also an opportunity for library staff to develop their skills in managing cultural projects, working with partners, engaging local communities, and reaching new and diverse audiences. Although Libraries Connected has run many such projects in the past, this was one of the first times it had supported heads of service to create and secure funding for a new project, and then held funding centrally to deliver a national programme of cultural activity at this scale, and over such a long period of time.

For Oxygen Arts, *Into the Light* was an opportunity to take the stories of Black British dance professionals to a much wider audience. While the organisation's initial focus had been on working within the ballet industry, two successful tours of the *Island Movements* show and *Onisere* book readings to libraries in October 2023 and June 2024 had demonstrated the power of these stories to resonate with the public, and the value of libraries as a natural partner for the Project. *Into the Light* was an opportunity for Oxygen Arts to continue to build its relationships with libraries, develop some new offers, and ensure more people could hear about and be inspired by the stories of Black British dance professionals.

The specific outcomes for the programme that partners agreed with NLHF were that:

- People will have developed skills
- People will have greater wellbeing
- People will have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions, and
- Heritage will be identified and better explained

Leadership & governance of *Into the Light*

Oxygen Arts was the delivery partner for *Into the Light*. The organisation's involvement was led by Dr Sandie Bourne and Marsha Lowe, who were supported by a wider group of administrative staff, professional dancers, workshop facilitators, and panellists. BOM Media were commissioned to deliver the VR element of the programme (see below).

Libraries Connected acted as the link to participating library services, held the budget, provided governance, and managed the evaluation. The organisation's involvement was led by Tessa Blades, Sector Development Project Manager, with support from Emma Daniel, Project Manager in the Projects and Programmes team. A Project Board was established to provide oversight, comprising representatives from the library sector, and senior staff from Libraries Connected and Oxygen Arts. The Project Board was chaired by Kelly Saini Badwal (Head of Cultural Services at Sutton Libraries and Libraries Connected Trustee), who acted as Project Sponsor and link to the Libraries Connected Board.

Participation & activities

Library services that were keen to participate in *Into the Light* were asked to submit an Expression of Interest to Libraries Connected. As there was a great deal of interest in the programme, and it was oversubscribed, library services were offered the opportunity to take the programme for a shorter period of time / on a shared basis to allow more services to participate. In the end, twenty nine library services took part. Libraries contributed a total of £12K in match funding, which proved a

good way of securing their firm participation. Those library services taking the programme for a shorter period of time / on a shared basis made a smaller financial contribution.

In return for their contribution, all library services received the *Into the Light* exhibition. Each service also received up to c. £5000 worth of other activities (including travel costs for the delivery team). Services could choose these activities from a menu of offers to suit their library service and communities. These offers were as follows:

- The ***Island Movements*** show, followed by a **Q&A session** with the artistic team
- A **dance workshop**, led by a BBBP dancer, followed by an optional lecture & Q&A
- A **classical ballet workshop**, led by a BBBP dancer, followed by an optional lecture & Q&A
- An ***Onisere & the Ballet Queen* story-telling session** (for 4-8-year-olds)
- A **panel event**, featuring three dancers from the BBBP talking about their career journeys
- An **'In Conversation'** event, with a BBBP dancer being interviewed by Dr Sandie Bourne or Marsha Lowe
- A **presentation on the history of Black British Ballet**, by Dr Bourne
- A **dance photography workshop** (for 14 years-adult), with the course leader joined by a professional dancer as a model
- A **creative writing workshop** (for 9-16-year-olds), based around the themes of the exhibition
- ***Creating a VR experience***, an online and in-person talk outlining the steps taken to make the BBBP virtual reality experience, plus opportunities to view the exhibition in this format.

Libraries Connected liaised with library services on their preferred months for the exhibition and supporting activities, and created a tour schedule. The schedule of supporting activities was managed on an on-going basis by Oxygen Arts, which allowed for some flexibility in delivery where this was required (see next chapter).

In addition to activities designed and delivered by Oxygen Arts, library services could choose to commission local activity from the budget allocated to them (the guidance was that no more than £1K should be spent on local activities where library services received the full £5K budget for the programme).

Libraries Connected made a range of information, guidance, and resources available to participating libraries on its Basecamp. This included a recording of the launch webinar and some FAQs, which were updated as the programme progressed.

The table below lists the participating library services by the month in which they received the exhibition. Although most other programme activity was organised within these periods, in some cases activities started before and / or continued well beyond these dates.

| Exhibition dates | Library Services |
|------------------|--|
| October 2024 | Stockport, Redbridge |
| November 2024 | Liverpool, Camden |
| December 2024 | Calderdale, Bracknell |
| January 2025 | Bradford, Gloucestershire |
| February 2025 | Sunderland, Bristol |
| March 2025 | Lancashire, Solihull |
| April 2025 | North Tyneside, Sheffield |
| May 2025 | York, Rotherham |
| June 2025 | Middlesbrough, Northamptonshire, Walsall |

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| July 2025 | Hartlepool, Staffordshire |
| August 2025 | Redcar & Cleveland, Wakefield |
| September 2025 | Hull, Nottinghamshire |
| October 2025 | North Lincolnshire, Suffolk |
| November 2025 | North Yorkshire, Buckinghamshire |

About the evaluation & this report

In late Summer 2024, Libraries Connected commissioned this author to provide some assistance with the evaluation of *Into the Light*. The evaluation was conceived as a joint effort, with Libraries Connected responsible for designing surveys and gathering data from participating libraries and members of the public, and this author responsible for providing feedback on survey design, carrying out a small amount of independent research, analysing data, and writing the evaluation report.

This report sets out the main findings from the evaluation. It draws on:

- A series of **reflection sessions** with the Libraries Connected and Oxygen Arts staff who led the programme (hosted by this author)
- A **survey of participating library services**, which asked for both attendance data and feedback on programme delivery and impact (surveys were returned by all 29 services, in two cases by more than one person at each service²)
- **Surveys for members of the public** who attended or took part in programme events. There were three separate participant surveys, after early feedback from libraries suggested simpler versions were required for children and young people:
 - A main survey largely completed by adults (returned by 410 respondents taking part in events in 21 of the 29 areas)³
 - A survey for children aged 5-11 (returned by 228 respondents taking part in events in 9 of the 29 areas)
 - A survey for children aged 11-18 (returned by 103 respondents taking part in events in 8 of the 29 areas)
- **In-depth case study interviews** with staff at three participating library services (conducted by this author)
- **Attendance** (by this author) **at a series of events** at Bracknell Central Library on 12th April 2025 (including a ballet workshop, dance workshop, and ‘In Conversation’ discussion with Julie Felix, a dancer from the BBBP), and a visit to the exhibition at Pancras Square Library in Camden in November 2024
- A **lessons learned log** created by the Libraries Connected Projects and Programme team
- Notes from a **lessons learned meeting** of the Libraries Connected Project Board on 24th February 2026 in Newport.

The rest of this report is set out in the following way:

- **Chapter 2** explores library services’ motivations for participating in the programme
- **Chapter 3** explores experiences of delivering the programme and reaching audiences

² Attendance data was not provided for every event in every area. In some cases, this may be because surveys were returned before final, rescheduled, events were held. See Chapter Three for more details.

³ In the main survey, of the 358 people responding to a question about their age and providing information, 86% (307) were adults and 14% (51) were under 18. Some children and young people may have chosen to respond to this survey, or responded before the two other surveys were designed. In some cases, the main and child surveys were completed by parents / carers or school leaders on behalf of young people.

- **Chapter 4** discusses reactions to the programme from libraries and members of the public
- **Chapter 5** discusses the impact and possible legacy of the programme for members of the public, library services, and programme partners
- **Chapter 6** provides a brief conclusion and summarises the main learning for the future.

- **Appendix 1** lists the names of people who kindly responded to the library survey
- **Appendix 2** sets out the programme activities hosted in each area
- **Appendix 3** provides further information about the programme activities on offer
- **Appendix 4** sets out some of the positive media coverage the programme achieved.

A case study on **Redbridge's experiences** can be found on pages 12-13

A case study on **Bracknell Forest's experiences** can be found on pages 24-25

A case study on **Calderdale's experiences** can be found on pages 35-36

1. Library services' motivations for taking part

Library services had a range of motivations for wanting to take part in this programme. It was common for respondents to the libraries' survey to mention a mix of different motivations, which are outlined below:

An interesting & different opportunity

For some library services, motivations were as simple as finding the programme intriguing. They saw participation as an opportunity to offer something different to local people, especially to those who may not normally visit libraries:

"It seemed like an amazing idea, and we wanted to bring this to people within the community."

"To offer something new to our customers and hopefully attract new audiences."

"It sounded an interesting project, which would bring something a bit unusual to the library, and to introduce themes and experiences to local people who would otherwise normally miss out."

Serving diverse communities & bringing different people together

For some library services, the motivation to take part was more specifically about creating opportunities to reach out to and better serve diverse communities by showcasing and celebrating Black stories, experiences, and heritage. Several respondents from areas with small but growing minority communities highlighted the programme's importance in this respect. Others cited its fit with important Council and area-wide goals around equality and diversity, and strategic initiatives such as Black History Month and Cities and Libraries of Sanctuary:

"We want to support, celebrate, and promote understanding of Black heritage and culture across our audiences."

"The project was of real interest as ... a predominantly White [area] ... In the last few years our Black and African communities have increased significantly, and we felt this programme would allow an opportunity for our service to be more inclusive ..."

"... to feed into, and be the highlight of, our larger Black History Month programme ... which enables us to deliver on ... council-wide ... objectives ... to build stronger and more sustainable communities ... [by] reflecting local communities, engaging new audiences and bringing diverse communities together ..."

Demonstrating the importance of libraries as cultural venues

Many respondents cited expanding access to cultural opportunities (particularly in more deprived areas and for underserved communities), diversifying their library service's cultural offer, and

reinforcing the role of libraries as accessible cultural venues as motivations for participation. There was excitement about hosting a dance project (which was seen as unusual in a library setting) and a ballet project in particular, which respondents felt was an art form that many people would not ordinarily have the chance to experience. A few respondents specifically mentioned opportunities to inspire, motivate, and provide a platform for Black dancers and creatives as a draw. Several respondents noted the programme's fit with broader cultural goals and initiatives:

"It was a fantastic opportunity to take part in a project working with communities that are underrepresented in the arts, and to facilitate access to arts and cultural activities in our libraries, bringing them to new audiences."

"We wanted to diversify and develop our cultural offer ..."

"We don't have much in the way of dance programmes in the library and we hope to attract new audiences that are normally excluded from attending participatory events like these."

"It seemed a unique, affordable way to bring ballet to [our area] ... It was also great to support and highlight the too often hidden histories of people of colour."

"... This history of ballet is important to diverse communities who have traditionally been excluded from the arts; children and dance students who think ballet is not 'for them'; and professionals and academic / cultural leaders who are able to influence others ..."

The chance to be part of a national project

Several respondents emphasised how challenging it can be for libraries to find the resources to put on programmes of this kind. Others felt they didn't have the experience or the contacts to do so. In this context, the opportunity to take part in a national programme, with funding and wrap-around support was especially welcome. A few respondents mentioned the chance to work alongside colleagues in other library services as an attraction. A couple said they were inspired to take part after hearing about the programme from Oxygen Arts and / or heads of service involved in Libraries Connected who they respected:

"We are always keen to engage in creative activity across our service, supporting the Culture ULO, however increasingly tightened budgets makes this more difficult ..."

"... The funding was a big attraction!"

"Diverse programming we would struggle to have the contacts to arrange ourselves. Packaged with a menu of events and strengthened by being part of a larger programme."

"... Oxygen Arts offered a high-quality exhibition opportunity with excellent support events and activities."

"... We were excited to be part of this partnership project with other library services across the UK."

Developing skills & raising the profile of libraries

Some library leads mentioned opportunities for staff and volunteers to develop new skills in project and event management, community outreach, and partnership working as motivations for wanting to take part. Others hoped that participating might raise ambitions within their service and / or the profile of their service within the Council or local area:

“... The project provides opportunities for new and existing volunteers ... [and to] support the personal development of our staff...”

“Raise [the] profile of [the] library service in the Council, bring new people from the community into our libraries.”

“... This project gave us the opportunity to change our approach, raise ambitions, offer a varied programme and present new initiatives such as a VR exhibition.”

The attraction of *Island Movements*

Finally, several respondents had already hosted the *Island Movements* show and were pleased to have the opportunity to bring it back to their communities, alongside a wider programme of events and activities. Others had heard about the show and were particularly keen to welcome it to their libraries:

*“We had previously hosted the *Island Movements* performance and so enjoyed it ...”*

*“We had the *Windrush* performance a few years ago and wanted to host more activities in [our area] this year.”*

*“Particularly for the opportunity to bring the *Island Movements* ballet performance to our community ...”*

*“Although I was not working for the library service at that time, I have heard nothing but positive feedback from staff and patrons about the *Island Movements* programme in October 2024, long after it took place ... Hosting *Black British Ballet* again so patrons could explore it further was an easy decision.”*

Case study: Redbridge

Vision Redbridge Culture & Leisure (Vision RCL) runs a network of libraries across the borough. The Black British Ballet Project (BBBP) was hosted at four of these libraries (Central, Fullwell Cross, Goodmayes, and Hainault) during Black History Month (October 2024), at the beginning of the BBBP tour. Vision RCL was the only library service to programme BBBP activity outside, in the public realm, reaching people who might not otherwise have engaged with their library. In addition to the *Island Movements* show and the exhibition, BBBP provided dance, ballet, photography, and creative writing workshops, as well as storytelling sessions. Activities were extremely well received, and taking part in the project has enabled library staff to strengthen relationships with key community groups and develop some useful new skills. Vision RCL's involvement was led by Viktoria Nourpeissova, Culture and Library Development Officer, who spoke to this author in April 2025.

About the library service

"We are a leisure trust, we're commissioned by the local authority to look after the cultural spaces, so theatre, parks, libraries ... We have 11 libraries in total ...

Redbridge is an incredibly diverse area ... Our main community is Asian, South Asian in particular ... We work closely with the local authority on their strategic priorities ... so, for example, we have South Asian Heritage Month ... We always programme for Black History Month as well ... and around that there's other activity to celebrate ... diverse voices and audiences ... Families are the main group that engage with us regularly ... teens and older people ... they are our target groups ...

My role straddles library development ... and the culture team ... [which] is mainly focused at the moment ... on ... Redbridge Outdoor Arts (ROA), which brings free, accessible performances to the high streets of low engaged areas ... ROA prioritises programming from organisations led by the Global Majority to address historical under-representation and promote greater diversity and inclusion in the arts. By actively supporting these groups, we aim to create a more vibrant, representative, and equitable outdoor arts sector. This focus also ensures that a wider range of perspectives and artistic voices are heard and celebrated, ultimately enriching the cultural landscape ...

Motivations for taking part

Redbridge is part of ASCEL ... the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (now Libraries Rising) ... The London group ... are really good at inviting speakers to come along and talk about projects ... That's how I met Marsha from the BBBP. She was talking about the project ... and it sounded amazing ... so I reached out to her after the meeting ...

At that point ... in 2023 ... it was just a pilot ... and I invited them to perform inside Redbridge Central Library ... in the foyer space ... I was really blown away by the idea of bringing something like this into a library space! ... It was the sort of ballet that was very accessible ... and ... it was such a strong story ... that it really resonated with a lot of the community ... [Then last year] Redbridge Outdoor Arts were looking for ideas for programming, and we kept coming back to that performance ... it just stuck with us. And we thought this would be amazing outdoors. We could get so many more people engaged ... We were keen to go for October, because it was Black History month ... we felt it would be perfect if ... the stars aligned! ... And, in the end, it made up the majority of our programme for Black History Month!

Activities and engagement

*The library contributed a small amount of money and got a menu of offers in return ... We very much saw the *Island Movements* performances as the showcase ... then there was the exhibition and VR headsets ... and other workshops ... So, it worked perfectly to create quite a cohesive programme for us ... A lot of the activities were programmed before the show, because we wanted people to get involved ... so they had that background knowledge and interest ... It was a way for us to promote the show in a more interesting way ... BBBP was a great community engagement and audience development initiative ...*

The show was held outside ... So, in Fullwell Cross library, we've got ... Ken Aston Square ... right outside, which is brilliant for performances. We had the show there ... and the dancers had their Q&A there too ... It

started to rain, but they were amazing! We had a local artist ... doing projects within that space. We also had crafts, and we did the arts award as part of it as well ... we really wanted to have that mini festival energy Then in Ilford, the library is a two-minute walk away from the high street where we held the show ... it's within sight ... And the numbers were huge! ... around a thousand for the shows ... whereas we would be looking at maybe 75% of that for our other outdoor arts shows ...

It was helpful to have a range of activities offered ... because I think the things that people need in different areas vary. So ... the east and south of the borough ... are ... not as high income as the west, so we tried to focus on those areas ... offering something ... that people might not have access to otherwise ... We still did some programming in the west, but ... more to engage kids in creative writing and ... the telling of stories from different backgrounds ... We were very lucky that the riots didn't really touch us last year. However, that feeling of fear was still around. So just ... having these diverse stories, and recognising that our history is so different, really resonated with people ...

The main feedback has been 'we want more of this'! It's been so lovely ... to hear ... 'oh, this really resonated with me' ... or 'this story spoke to me' ...

Highlights

I think the ballet workshops worked particularly well. We got a mixed range of abilities, which was brilliant ... And there were lots of little black girls just really inspired ... It reached that demographic and sparked something in them. You could really see it. And then seeing those little girls in the crowds at the shows was amazing! Because it was also an all-female led performance, it really spoke to them ...

Another thing that worked really well was having the virtual reality headsets ... that element of technology really hits those groups that maybe wouldn't necessarily engage with an exhibition ... So, we had a lot more teens and older kids interested ... Plus, we then got to give the headsets to our Knit and Natter group ... who'd never tried VR before ... It was a really good way of introducing a type of technology that a lot of people find daunting ... So, that was a hit! ...

We also worked with the Ageless Teenagers, a group of West Indian retirees ... They did a tea dance and a quadrille alongside the show, and they brought all their families along! ... It was brilliant to chat with them as well. Their stories were so beautiful, and ... the show sparked so many conversations ...

Impact on / lasting legacy for the library service

We've built some brilliant relationships with local communities because of the project ... The Ageless Teenagers come to do exercise in the library, but they hadn't really engaged with us before ... And Barkingside Art Club ... they are a group that offers art to children with additional needs. I asked Marsha and Sandie if they would be willing to do an adapted storytelling session of Onisere and the Ballet Queen ... and they were happy to do that ... The Club have Creative Ambassadors, a group of teens, a lot of whom are autistic or have additional needs ... One young man worked with the club lead to make an adapted version of the story ... So ... [the project] enabled us to experiment with different ways of working with them ... We also trained up quite a few members of staff on working with the headsets and ... I think they're interested in doing something like that again. And the workshops just stuck with staff too ... the joy and the feeling of community that they brought ... Overall, BBBP helped to raise ambition and elevate Redbridge libraries' reputation with the community and the wider library sector too, as I was asked to present at the Libraries Connected conference with Marsha, and support a BBBP webinar ...

Looking to the future

I would definitely recommend the programme ... It's so unique and special that it was offered to the library. It's such a brilliant way to start conversations, to raise awareness ... to engage, but in a different ... really fun and exciting way ... And everyone involved in the project, the dancers, Marsha, Sandie is just so lovely ... I'd love to work with them again ... that's definitely the dream. If we could get them back!

2. Delivering the programme & reaching audiences

Delivering the programme

Overall experiences

This has been an ambitious programme, involving a range of different types of activity being hosted in 29 different library services across England, over a fifteen/sixteen-month period.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, evaluation evidence suggests it has been quite a complex programme to deliver and manage. Both programme partners recognise the benefits of having worked together, allowing Oxygen Arts to focus on delivery, while Libraries Connected provided oversight and support with budgeting, reporting, and liaison with library services. Both partners report positive experiences of collaboration. Oxygen Arts have particularly appreciated the supportive and enthusiastic way in which the Libraries Connected staff team and sponsors have approached the programme. The Libraries Connected team have appreciated the responsive and flexible way in which Oxygen Arts have carried out their work. It seems to have been helpful that leads at both organisations already knew each other, and that Oxygen Arts had some previous experience of working with libraries. While not everything has gone smoothly, the strength of the partnership seems to have been important in ensuring the overall success of the programme.

Evaluation evidence also suggests that taking part has been quite time-consuming and, at times, challenging for library services. While the vast majority of services seem to feel that their participation has been worth the effort, some would have appreciated greater clarity from the start about what might have been involved, especially given resource constraints at their service:

“It was very intense because we’ve tried to pack in so much in such a short space of time, but it was so worth it, I think.”

“[In future, it would help to] ... Clarify ... expectations early. Understanding the level of administrative work ... and operational commitments before agreeing to take part would help services accurately assess feasibility. This is particularly important for teams with limited staff and resources.”

Communication with & support from the programme organisers

Ratings for support

| Rating for support (5 is top) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|----|---|
| No. of library services | 0 | 4 | 9 | 10 | 6 |

Median score is 4, mean is 3.62, based on 29 library services

In the libraries survey, there was praise from many services for the way in which the delivery team communicated with and supported library colleagues throughout the programme. It is also clear that

many services have made very good use of programme activity and support to develop their practice in new ways. However, ratings for support are slightly lower than for other aspects of the programme, and the majority of suggestions for improvement centre on project management, communications, and support:

“It was really well organised ... there were a few little problems here and there ... But I think overall, given the scale of the project that they were delivering, it was really good.”

“All the team involved with this programme were supportive, engaging and accommodating. Would love to work with them all again in the future.”

“The actual programme was a great idea - indeed really wonderful, but the planning, support and communication could at times be very disorganised ...”

“We found some of the event management challenging ... However, on the whole, this was a wonderful series of events. Very well planned and organised and supported by the teams involved.”

There is some evidence to suggest that project management and communications were more challenging in the early stages of the programme. The fact that Oxygen Arts were touring the *Island Movements* show in October 2024, as well as finalising details of the programme, and beginning delivery in two library services may partly explain this. Changes within library service teams also seem to have been a factor, with handovers from bid-writing to delivery teams, reorganisations, and staff absences requiring programme partners to re-establish relationships and cover the basics again. It seems to have been helpful when the delivery team’s time for on-going project management, communications, and support was increased to a day a month. (Beyond an initial pot of days to design the programme, this was originally covered by a small uplift on the price of each event only):

“I think ... in some ways, stuff was still being developed. That was our feeling ... that not everything was in place. So those authorities that came ... three or four months later to the project ... stuff had been sorted out ...”

“... I returned from long-term sick and updated OA that I was the lead again, but information still got sent to the person who was covering, so some information got missed.”

“[It would have been] ... useful ... having an opportunity to communicate with Black British Ballet organisers well ahead of the events in case of situations like ours where our team had completely changed and we had no contacts or up-to-date information to go off of.”

Support with marketing and communications

Oxygen Arts developed a range of marketing and communications assets to help libraries to promote the programme to their audiences, including collating images on Flickr for sharing on Basecamp and use on libraries’ social media.

While some library services appear to have managed well in using available resources, and building on these, others seem to have found this more challenging. Evaluation evidence suggests some libraries had limited experience of running cultural events of this kind, lacked established mailing lists of people to invite, and had little or no resource for marketing or outreach. A small number of library services appeared unclear about roles and responsibilities for marketing between their service and the delivery partners. It was quite common for services to say they would have appreciated more supporting materials. Some of the library services who hosted the programme

early in its run felt that delivery of exhibition images had been a little slow and this had delayed their marketing efforts (the process of identifying and securing permissions proved complex and had to be covered by the central Oxygen Arts team after the curator left). Several respondents to the library survey said they would have appreciated more detailed descriptions of each offer, with more information about learning objectives/outcomes. There were mixed views about the usefulness of marketing and comms templates and other materials that were supplied, depending on experience and other in-house considerations.

To respond to these challenges, Libraries Connected, Oxygen Arts, and some of the libraries that had already hosted the programme put on a webinar to share learning on ways of reaching audiences, a good example of programme partners learning and adapting in real-time:

“This programme was packaged as a touring piece of work and we’ve found ... that it wasn’t ... there was an over reliance on the Library Service to ticket, market, promote and organise the events ...”

“There was a distinct lack of promotional resources ... which is a massive shame. It was challenging to market the events without knowing what to expect from them.”

“I’d asked for something and then one of the ladies said, ‘oh, we’ve got ... pictures that you could use’ ... [but] ... that wasn’t obvious. And ... it was a while till we got ... a bit of detail of what the workshops were ... Maybe we didn’t ask the question at the right time. But I think next time they set up any kind of a package ... those would be the kind of things for them to ... have ready...”

“... [A] Social media template would ... help us promote the wonderful thing the BBB do.”

“... Some event copy text needed editing to be suitable for our audiences. Poster templates were unnecessary, as we have our own branding guidelines. We only needed logos, approved images and finalised copy text to create materials that align with our brand ... [Also] ... media assets were not always easy to use or consistent in tone or design ...”

Technical requirements and support

Several libraries raised issues of a more technical nature. Many of these related to the VR experience. Some services said they were unable to make use of the headsets as they lacked the staff resource to oversee them and could not leave them unattended. There was also some confusion in libraries about the technical requirements for the headsets, especially around the need for wifi, and this also impacted on their use. There is limited evaluation data about the BBBP films that also formed part of this programme. However, it seems some libraries may have lacked suitable (and secure) monitors that could show the films on loop. In addition, a few libraries reported issues with exhibition panels and with finding suitable (uncarpeted) spaces for dance events:

“There were ... technical requests and assumptions made about the availability of equipment and technicians that caused problems. This probably happened due to a lack of understanding of delivering performances and events in ... an open public space not dedicated solely to that.”

“The VR headsets were a nice idea, but this is very hard to administer in a public library setting. The need for hard flooring is also quite tricky for libraries, as we tend to be carpeted!”

“... with local government ... you can’t just say ... here’s a bit of IT kit ... it needs to be something that’s self-sufficient ... or you have to do a long lead ...”

“... putting together the exhibition ... some of the foam ... connections were on the wrong side ... but they were brilliant ... and sorted it out ...”

“Some of the exhibition panels arrived in poor condition due to damage from touring. Better quality checks, repairs or refreshed panels would ensure a higher-quality presentation. Installation was also difficult due to the panel design.”

Logistical support up to & on the day

Quite a few of the comments from library services about programme delivery relate to the way in which Oxygen Arts and libraries worked together to finalise numbers of attendees for events and to handle logistics in the run up to, and on, the day. The delivery partners found that some libraries weren't very proactive in getting in contact to let them know about take up, making it more difficult to judge if events should be held or postponed. Several libraries said they didn't have direct contact details for the individuals who were delivering events, which made arrangements on the day more difficult. Towards the end of the run, Oxygen Arts began sending out confirmation emails a week before programmed activity, confirming timings and requesting participant numbers and contact details for the day, which seems like a helpful step to build into future programmes:

“We didn't have contact details for event facilitators and often messages we had around logistics weren't passed on. Communication was a little challenging for that reason ...”

“[It would have been helpful to have had] ... direct contact details for the people delivering the sessions so we can confirm arrival times etc. A few sessions felt quite rushed with the facilitators arriving very close to the start time and then needing to leave very quickly to catch trains ...”

Administrative requirements & support

Finally, some respondents to the library survey found the administrative set up and demands of the programme challenging. One or two people said they had difficulties accessing some of the information on the Libraries Connected basecamp. A few people said they felt the evaluation requirements could have been clarified sooner, and / or been simpler:

“It is difficult for staff to access the Basecamp, so emailing resources would be easier.”

“There was an overwhelming amount of project information shared, particularly via Basecamp. Too much documentation made it difficult to locate essential information quickly. The overall administrative burden was very high and time-consuming for services with limited capacity ... Evaluation requirements were onerous and involved a significant amount of administration. Some evaluation questions were not suitable or realistic for us to collect (e.g. tracking library members, non-members and new sign-ups, which we do not collect) ... Some evaluation instructions were only shared after key events (e.g. Island Movements), making it impossible to gather required data retrospectively ...”

Local activities

In addition to purchasing activities from the delivery partners, library services were free to use their available budget to commission local providers. The intention was to create more opportunities for local artists and to support the development of links between libraries and local creatives. In the end, only one area went ahead with local activities funded via the programme, with Inspire Nottingham commissioning a local poet to facilitate their creative writing workshop. However, Calderdale commissioned a local photographer to take photos for marketing and promotion purposes (which may be shown in future alongside images from the photography workshop), Hull, North Lincolnshire and Middlesbrough created a photography exhibition to complement *Into the*

Light (which featured images from the photography workshops), North Lincolnshire hosted a NT livestream of *Othello* during the exhibition period, and Vision Redbridge put on a wide range of additional programming as part of its outdoor arts festival and Black History Month celebrations. It may be that most library services lacked the time, resources, or community links to make full use of this opportunity, preferring to focus on offers that were already designed and ready to go.

Reaching audiences

Overview of engagement data

Overall figures and age

Across the 29 library services that took part in the programme, a conservative reading of the data provided by libraries suggests that 5789 opportunities were created to take part in a centrally organised BBBP event⁴. Fifty four percent (3151) were taken up by children, 12% (681) by adults (or young people over the age of 18), and a further 34% (1957) by people whose age is unknown⁵.

In addition, tens of thousands of people have had the opportunity to explore and enjoy the *Into the Light* exhibition. Data from just 18 of the 29 libraries, which is heavily caveated, estimates that engagement figures for the exhibition across these sites alone may be in the region of 44,716⁶.

Library membership

Monitoring data from libraries was not of sufficient quantity and quality to comment on the proportion of visitors or participants who were library members or who joined as a result of the programme⁷. Anecdotal data from some library leads suggests that more of the people attending events were library members than not. However, other leads reported that the programme has been successful in bringing in people who do not usually engage with libraries.

Of the respondents to the main participant survey who answered a question about library membership, 69% said they were already a member⁸, although it is not clear how typical respondents were of the full cohort of participants / audience members.

⁴ These figures may not relate to unique individuals. There is some data to suggest that the same people attended multiple events.

⁵ These figures are conservative, as some data is missing from six library services (relating to dance, ballet, photography, or creative writing workshops held at their venues). In most cases, missing data appears to relate to events rescheduled for Autumn / Winter 2025, after surveys had already been completed. The high number of people for whom age is unknown is significantly impacted by viewing figures for *Island Movements* in Redbridge, where the show was held outside, in a public space, as part of a wider festival of events.

⁶ Audience figures for the exhibition were only provided by 18 of the 29 library services. A small number of these library services provided precise numbers, as visits to the exhibition were ticketed, or the area in which the exhibition was held was barriered off. Most services provided either total footfall for the period the exhibition was on, or a percentage of footfall (varying from 10% to 50% depending on each service's different assumptions about what was appropriate). The figure included in this report is based on precise numbers where given, and 20% of footfall for those libraries providing this data (or 10% for the four library services that hosted the programme on a 0.5 basis). Figures based on estimated footfall may not equate to unique visitors.

⁷ It was common for library services to say that they didn't collect membership details when booking tickets and didn't have the capacity to check this at / after events. However, what little data there is, confirms 51 people joined their library after taking part in *Onisere* story-telling sessions or dance, photography, or creative writing workshops, with 36 joining a single library service after the dance sessions that were held there.

⁸ This survey was completed by 410 people. Three hundred and sixty-five people answered a question about library membership. Of these, 69% (251) said they were a member before the event, 0.3% (1) said they joined for the event, 28% (103) said they were not a member, and 3% (10) said they were not sure.

Other characteristics of audiences & participants

Anecdotal evidence from some library leads suggests the programme has been successful in attracting more ethnically diverse visitors, audience members, and participants.

The only source of quantitative data on ethnicity comes from the main participant survey⁹. Of the 342 people providing their ethnicity, 63% (214) described their ethnicity as White, 19% (65) as Black, Mixed White/Black Caribbean or Mixed White/Black African, and 18% (63) as Asian, Other, Mixed White/Asian or Mixed Other.

In the same survey, respondents were asked if they had been to the ballet before. Of the 374 people answering this question, 55% (204) said yes, 40% (150) said no, and 5% (20) weren't sure. Comments from library leads and from participants suggest the programme has provided an impactful first experience of ballet for many people (see Chapter Four).

Engagement figures for particular offers

| BBB offer | No.s engaging (library survey) | Types of people engaging (library survey) |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Exhibition | 44,716 (est., data from 18 of 29 services) Plus, 91 for VR exhib. (Redbridge) | Range of library users |
| Island Movements show | 1796 (data from all 11 services) | 17% (298) under 18 10% (171) adults 74% (1327) age unknown |
| Dance workshop | 853 (data from 15 of 17 services) | 77% (656) under 18 19% (159) adults 4% (38) age unknown |
| Classical Ballet workshop | 312 (data from 12 of 14 services) | 65% (202) under 18 13% (42) adults 22% (68) age unknown |
| Onisere story-telling (4-8 years) | 1800 (data from all 24 services) | 85% (1524) under 18 5% (85) adults 11% (191) age unknown |
| Panel event | 23 (data from both/2 services) | 0% (0) under 18 48% (11) adults 52% (12) age unknown |
| In Conversation with a BBBP dancer | 140 (data from all 7 services) | 3% (4) under 18 4% (5) adults 94% (131) age unknown |
| BBBP presentation from Dr Bourne | 198 (data from all 8 services) | 48% (95) under 18 30% (59) adults 22% (44) age unknown |

⁹ Of the 360 people answering this question, 342 provided their ethnicity, with 18 preferring not to say. Of the 342, the breakdown was as follows: 195 White British; 5 White Irish; 14 White Other; 35 Black Caribbean; 9 Black African; 6 Black Other; 21 Asian, Indian; 8 Asian, Pakistani; 6 Asian, Bangladeshi; 3 Asian, Chinese; 8 Asian, Other; 2 Other, Arab; 12 Mixed White/Black Caribbean; 3 Mixed White/Black African; 10 Mixed White/Asian; 5 Mixed, Other.

| BBB offer | No.s engaging (library survey) | Types of people engaging (library survey) |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| Dance photography workshop (14 years-adult) | 281 (data from 17 of 19 services) | 19% (53) under 18 42% (118) adults 39% (110) age unknown |
| Creative writing workshop (9-16 years) | 364 (data from 17 of 18 services) | 87% (316) under 18 5% (19) adults 8% (29) age unknown |
| Creating a VR experience (online) | 7 (data from only/1 service) | 0% (0) under 18 0% (0) adults 100% (7) age unknown |
| Creating a VR experience (in- person) | 15 (data from both/2 services) | 20% (3) under 18 80% (12) adults 0% (0) age unknown |
| Totals | 5789 (data excludes exhibition) | 54% (3151) under 18 12% (681) adults 34% (1957) age unknown |

Satisfaction with engagement

In their comments, library service leads reported reaching a wide range of visitors, audience members, and participants, including: people of different ages (from small children to older adults); people from different ethnic communities; family, school / college and community groups, as well as individual sign-ups; and people with varying levels of ability in dance and knowledge about ballet, Black ballet, and the wider issues facing Black communities in the UK.

Some library services reported being very pleased with the range and number of people reached through the programme. Others reported more mixed results. However overall, it was common for library leads to say it was a shame that more people didn't have the chance to take part, especially given the high quality of activities:

"We were keen to reach global majority audiences, including Black British but also Asian and minority ethnic communities in Bristol ... We also wanted to reach people who are not library members and who might not have attended a library event before ... it feels as though this project has been really successful in this regard, as audiences for ballet performance / in conversation were definitely more diverse than we typically see ..."

"We wanted to diversify our audiences with the BBB offer and did see this happen in venues closer to the City, but with less success in the more rural parts of the county."

"We did see some new people ... However, a large number of our attendees were regular library visitors who commented that it was a shame that more people didn't know about them because the events were so good."

"We were pleased to see a variety of ages, genders, abilities, and backgrounds come out to these events, but we do feel we did not reach as many as we could have ..."

Cancellations & rescheduling

Over the course of the programme, c. 210 events were run in the 29 participating library services. However, there were also a relatively high number of cancellations, c. 60, most in advance but a small number at the last minute. This seems to have been a particular issue over the Summer of

2025, when members of the public may have been away or engaged in other activities. Attendance was also hit (to a lesser extent) during the Winter months, when bad weather may have put some people off coming out. Several library leads said they felt that the fact that the events were free might have made last minute drop-outs more likely. For the most part, library services were appreciative of Oxygen Arts being flexible and agreeing to reschedule events, sometimes several months beyond the original time period for their area. However, one or two found communication around the over / under spend a little confusing (which may have related to the fact that travel costs were variable and not included in the menu of costed options). Rescheduling also undoubtedly added to the complexity of managing the programme (for both delivery partners and libraries):

“There were a couple ... unfortunately of no shows ... there are always no shows with free library activities. It’s just inevitable. It happens with every single activity throughout the year.”

“... it was ... unfortunate that we had the events in Winter - we had some bad weather and suffered from low attendance at times.”

“We were allocated [a summer month] ... which proved to be difficult as we were unable to engage with school class visits. We did host a day of dance workshops rescheduled to November due to low ... bookings ... and this was popular with local school children...”

“Our original programme matched our staffing capacity, and adding extra events created additional workload, including finding suitable dates and rooms ... arranging staffing and adjusting schedules at short notice.”

Engagement successes & challenges

Respondents to the library survey point to some common successes and challenges in reaching audiences with this programme¹⁰.

Children, young people, & families

For many library services, children, young people, and families were key audiences for this programme. Respondents to the library survey reported some success in reaching younger children (often through schools, see below). It seems to have been harder to reach older children and teenagers, a challenge that some respondents said was common for library offers. However, the photography workshop was popular with this age group (and the VR offer seems to have been too, notwithstanding the technical issues outlined above). A few services felt that age guidelines for offers were not always quite right. One or two felt age categories (for dance workshops) should have been lower to attract more participants, while others thought they should have been higher (mostly relating to the *Onisere* story-telling session, which some staff felt was more appropriate for slightly older children).

“... We ... do really well for family events, so wanted to encourage young people in but found that hard ...”

“I think having the virtual reality headsets ... really helped engage people ... in a way they wouldn't ... necessarily do with the physical exhibition ... that element of technology ... really hits those ... groups

¹⁰ Of the 410 (largely adult) respondents to the main participant survey, 397 answered a question about how they heard about the BBBP event they attended. Of these, the breakdown was as follows: 24% (96) library newsletter / noticeboard; 17% (66) social media; 4% (15) BBBP or Libraries Connected websites; 23% (90) word of mouth; 9% (35) school; 24% (95) other (a mix of other contact with the library / library staff, searching on relevant events websites, hearing about the event from partner organisations, and walking or driving past).

... so we had a lot more ... teens and older kids interested and that was a way to get them engaged ... because we weren't able to engage with them in other ways."

"... The photography workshop was an excellent hook to work with older teens who we tend to not engage with as much ..."

"Due to the dance workshop being offered as 11yrs+, we were hoping this would be an excellent opportunity to engage older children and teens, who have been notoriously difficult to engage in activities within the library. However, unfortunately, there was not enough uptake, and we had to cancel one of the sessions and push for an age reduction on the following session."

"... our feeling was that the Onisere book was perhaps a little older than the lower age group advertised and should perhaps be from age 8/9 upwards. However, the younger children still really enjoyed the sessions..."

Working with schools

Many respondents to the library survey said that engaging schools was a good way of guaranteeing sufficient numbers of participants and was easier than open recruitment aimed at individual members of the public. Libraries sometimes found it challenging to identify and get in touch with the relevant school lead, and some found schools slow to confirm arrangements and numbers. However, overall, this seems to have been a successful approach to engagement. Library services seem to have found it easier to reach and work with primary schools than secondary schools and colleges, with the *Onisere* offer proving particularly popular:

"We were keen to bring in audiences from non-white backgrounds, particularly children. I feel the Onisere events really helped to draw in schools, and we were successful in getting schools who fit this criteria. They were incredibly keen to participate."

"Having that outreach to schools, it was very much hitting ... a whole year group to ... engage those that aren't [necessarily] interested in dance."

"... We were particularly successful in targeting primary schools ... in the end the places being oversubscribed. The secondary schools and the local college were more disappointing, despite being constantly chased. Whilst they were very keen, most primary schools took a while to confirm their bookings. All of this made it quite difficult to make any spare places available to either individuals or community groups."

Working with community groups

Some libraries also reported success in working with community partners to publicise programme activities and widen access to those who do not regularly engage with the library service:

"...We did a lot of targeted marketing to promote the events that were open to the public, especially with partners and community organisations across the city, which worked really well."

"We took a different approach from our usual PR activity (social media campaigns, posters, flyers and local press). To extend our reach, we targeted interest-based community groups and sector-specific networks, including ballet and dance groups, camera clubs, creative industries contacts, media and tech networks ... These audiences typically fall under people who do not usually engage with libraries or arts programming, and this approach helped us extend the programme's reach beyond our regular participants."

Using the Island Movements show (& other events) as a hook

Several library services said they found the show to be a useful hook to reach a diverse range of community members and around which to organise other events. The show was usually (perhaps unsurprisingly) the event that attracted the largest numbers of people. Libraries didn't always have spaces of sufficient size to accommodate large audiences, with one service saying they were sad that the show had to be delivered elsewhere as a consequence, and another (who fought for the show to be hosted in their library) having to accommodate themselves to lower numbers as a result. It sometimes seems to have helped boost engagement when BBB events were held as part of wider festivals / programmes. However, this was not always the case:

"We were keen to engage people who may not usually have access to such cultural activities. This was definitely achieved with the Island Movement performance ... for many people it was the first time they had seen a ballet ..."

"We really wanted to reach a wide community, but also encourage the global majority into the libraries as we have a large population in our county, but not many library users. When we hosted the ballet that was a success, but these wraparound talks were less appealing to them."

"We wanted to engage younger audiences to our library, and non-library users. The event with the largest audience was the performance, but unfortunately this didn't fit in our library site so had to be delivered in a partner venue."

"Having a varied, month-long programme meant the project was embedded in Black History Month. This helped to build momentum, with lots of content for marketing campaigns and signposting to different events ... Having a performance that they were able to join for free, meant people would then be encouraged to pop into the library to look at the exhibition or explore other activities taking place as part of the project."

Case study: Bracknell Forest

Bracknell Forest Council runs a network of nine libraries across the borough. The Black British Ballet Project (BBBP) was hosted at Bracknell Library, in the town centre, from December 2024 to April 2025. In addition to the exhibition, BBBP provided dance, ballet, photography, and creative writing workshops, as well as storytelling sessions and conversations with BBBP dancers. Activities were very well received, and the Project has provided an opportunity to raise the profile of the library service in the Council and the community, and to build relationships with local schools. It has also enabled librarians to forge a strong relationship with Libraries Connected, which has led to Bracknell making a successful bid to take part in the Our Freedom Then and Now project. Bracknell's involvement was led, until November 2024, by Micheline Katts, Library Operations Manager, and after this by Anne Hayward, Adult and Digital Librarian, and Laura Colley Ward, then Digital and ICT Services Librarian. The three staff members spoke to this author in September 2025.

About the library service

Micheline: *"Having come out of Covid, there was quite a lot of change within the library service ... we recently underwent a review ... and there was a change in focus, with us adopting a community hub model ... things are still quite new ... but ... we're trying ... to align more with the council ... to work more closely with colleagues there ... it's about using our libraries as flexible spaces. We're like the face of the Council ... so lots of services where customers are coming in ... for bus passes etc ... it's now done at libraries ... so, we're a lot more than just books. We're a Net Zero hub ... since 2023/2024 we've been ... designated warm hubs ... we're about ... enriching cultural spaces."*

Laura: *"There are people from all walks of life that come into our libraries ... You have doctors studying upstairs and homeless people coming in for our data bank services and just to keep warm."*

Micheline: *"In the last three years, the community has also changed a lot ... we're trying to work more closely with the different communities, using our librarians to find out what it is that people want for this space ... Building partnerships and developing new projects is part of the new drive ... This project was one of the first ... since Covid ... and this change in focus."*

Motivations for taking part

Micheline: *"When the opportunity first came up ... everybody was like 'yes, yes, yes!' ... because ... at the time we were starting to talk about Bracknell libraries becoming more of a cultural centre ... obviously we then had to ... get the go ahead because we were contributing £500 ... and ... council budgets are always tight ... but we felt what we were getting back was going to be ... something new, something different for us ... it was just intriguing ... because it was ballet, so that's different. And then ... it was black ballet! ... With the community that we serve being so diverse ... we just thought ... wouldn't it be wonderful to see how it could go?"*

Activities and engagement

Micheline: *"When we were thinking about activities ... we were looking first at families, because we knew we would be able to draw them in ... we also then chose some of the In Conversation events ... which obviously were more adult focused ... We used one of the In Conversation sessions as part of our volunteer thank you Christmas Coffee mornings, so that was rather nice! ... Darren Panton from BBBP came in ... and his story was just absolutely electric! Everyone, I think, had a tear in their eye! He really was great ..."*

Anne: *"When I was contacting BBBP to discuss the events, they came back to me and said, 'oh we've got availability on these dates if you want to do any more'"*.

Micheline: *"So, we set up some further activities ... we went to a primary school ... and BBBP came and did the storytelling ... which was very popular ... I said to the children's librarian, 'is there a school close by that you think we should approach', and she said ... 'there's this one I've been struggling to get into, maybe this programme might just hook them' ... And obviously that did the trick because once we explained what it was, they brought the children in ... 70 or 80 ... they came with parents and teachers, and they could see and use the space ... We've got a good relationship with the school now, for the Summer reading challenge ... It*

was helpful to have events over a few months ... the numbers attending ... in the beginning ... were quite low ... but by the end ... you could really see the progression ... it's just about getting to know our community and what they would come out for."

Highlights

Anne: *"The talks were so inspiring ... both Darren's with the volunteers and Darren talking to the children during the dance workshop. He was very inspiring to the children ... he was so encouraging ... that close contact with a ballet dancer was amazing."*

Micheline: *"Julie Felix came to give a talk about her career ... and you got that lump in your throat ... her story ... hearing about the extra barriers she faced ... I think that's what really touched people ... that could have linked in with somebody else's experience ... so they think 'well, actually I'm not alone'. And Darren and Julie were so generous in being so honest ... I think that genuineness and generosity of spirit definitely came through ... People really enjoyed the exhibition as well ... it was in the centre of our library, so customers were like 'what's this?' And then of course ... the lovely photographs ... each of these three-sided stands had a different dancer, so people might recognise them, or ... say 'oh yes, I remember the 1970s' ... so it brought out other conversations ... everybody wants to access these things in a different way. So, it's great that they have different mediums for people to do that."*

Impact on / lasting legacy for the library service

Anne: *"It's really important to think about things that are just completely different to bring new audiences into the library, and that was what the benefit of the Ballet Project was for us ... it also really helped us to raise our profile in the Council because we were able to ... shout out about what we were doing, on the council's website, and across social media ... We were able to promote our events in the Council's newsletter, which we don't always manage to ... by being so different it helped us show case what we offer."*

Laura: *"We had the final event ... and ... there were lots of people at it ... we built a really great relationship with Tessa and Libraries Connected there ... and then we joined the Libraries Connected Basecamp ... where we're in touch with other libraries ... we chat, share ideas, and talk about projects and funding opportunities and good practice ... so not only did we get a fabulous offering in the Black Ballet Project ... which really our communities loved ... but as a library service ... it gave us a real opportunity to network with other libraries and with other professionals that maybe we wouldn't have necessarily had otherwise."*

Anne: *"We then got funding for the Our Freedom, Then and Now project through Libraries Connected ... art centres and libraries were invited to bid to create ... projects and ... events celebrating the end of the Second World War and exploring ideas of what freedom means to the community ... Tessa told us about it and recommended we apply ... it has been great to move on from the ballet project to this ... it's been amazing to be part of such a big campaign ... and something I hope will lead on to other good things too."*

Looking to the future

Micheline: *"The BBBP certainly made people think, 'oh look what a library can offer!' ... And from our side, I think it did create more awareness ... that this is what we want our libraries to be ... there's room to develop our skills a bit more, but the opportunities are there. And now I think it's about us having the bravery to say, 'yes, let's go for it!' like we did with this project ... it's helped us to grow and given us a really positive experience."*

3. Reactions to the programme

Overall reactions to the programme

| Rating for quality (5 is top) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|----|----|
| No. of library services | 0 | 0 | 4 | 14 | 11 |

Median score is 4, mean is 4.24, based on 29 library services

Feedback from libraries on the quality of events, and public reactions to the programme, have been extremely positive. Twenty five of the 29 library services (86%) rated the quality of the programme to be either very good or good. The overwhelming majority of respondents to the main participant survey (95%), said they would recommend the Black British Ballet Project to others¹¹. All offers seem to have been well-received, with the show being a particular highlight for many, alongside some of the other workshops and events. By way of illustration, 97% of (the 147) respondents to the main participant survey who rated the show felt it was very good or good¹², and 95% of (the 141) respondents to all three participant surveys who rated the ballet workshops felt they were very good or good¹³:

“The programme has been received extremely positively, well beyond our expectations ... Feedback across the programme has been consistently enthusiastic ... Overall, the programme clearly resonated with participants, created meaningful engagement, and demonstrated strong public appreciation for the partnership with Black British Ballet Project, Oxygen Arts and Libraries Connected ...” (Library service lead)

“... It was received well with the public making comments such as ‘Fantastic’ and ‘Brilliant’” (Library service lead)

“The programme has been received exceptionally well ... Visitors and participants commented on the pride this programme has filled them with, to see the diversity of the community ... being represented ...” (Library service lead)

Overall, there were few negative comments about the activities. The most common sentiment was about wishing more people could have had the chance to take part:

“Very well received, some regulars have commented that they wish others had heard about [this] so they could have attended and enjoyed the events.” (Library service lead)

¹¹ Of the 410 respondents to the main participant survey, 370 answered this question. Of these, 95% (350) said yes, 0.3% (1) said no, and 5% (19) said they weren’t sure.

¹² In the main participant survey, 147 respondents rated the show. Estimated viewing figures are 1796. See table at the end of this Chapter for more details.

¹³ Across the three participant surveys, 141 respondents rated the ballet workshops (53 respondents to the main participant survey, 40 to the survey for children aged 5-11, and 48 to the survey for children aged 11-18). Estimated participation numbers are 312. See the table at the end of this Chapter for more details.

Aspects of the programme that were particularly well-received

Enjoyable, interesting, & different

Visitors, audience members, and participants emphasised how much they had enjoyed BBBP activities. It was also common for people to remark on how unusual and different they were to activities that tend to be on offer at their local library. Members of the public were especially delighted to see dance on offer as this was seen as particularly novel in a library setting. While seemingly particular in their nature, the stories of Black British Ballet professionals have clearly been of interest to, and resonated with, a wide variety of people.¹⁴

“Not every day you get dance tuition from a ballet professional in a local library!” (Participant, main survey)

“It was a joy to see the faces of the audience, especially the children” (Participant, main survey)

“Amazing!” (Participant, main survey)

Opportunities for interaction

For many members of the public, the interactive nature of the programme was a great strength. The chance to meet external creatives, and professional ballet dancers in particular, was a highlight, especially for many younger people. The opportunity to engage with the dancers and hear their stories at talks and Q&As was described by several people as a privilege. Members of the public also valued the opportunity to share the events and discuss their meaning and significance alongside other members of their local community:

“Participants highlighted the quality of the workshops, the welcoming environment, and the inspiration they and their children gained from engaging with Black British Ballet artists ...” (Library service lead)

“[Our target was] ... local children who would not have had much experience of working with external creatives - we feel this was achieved with the creative writing workshop and ... the photography workshop.” (Library service lead)

“Great that it felt like a discussion with an audience who worked to get into the issues. Enjoyed the interactivity.” (Participant, main survey)

Powerful representations

For visitors, audience members, and participants who are Black or of mixed heritage, the chance to see, hear from, and celebrate the successes of Black dancers and creatives seems to have been particularly impactful:

“As a black family, it was great to see ourselves in ballet.” (Participant, main survey)

¹⁴ The stories of Black British Ballet professionals seem to have appealed to both adults and children and young people. Of the 228 respondents to the survey designed for 5–11-year-olds, 218 answered a question about whether they found the stories interesting. Of these, 55% (120) said yes, 4% (8) said no, and 41% (90) said sort of. Of the 103 respondents to the survey designed for 11–18-year-olds, 93 answered a question about whether they found Black British Ballet stories interesting. Of these, 84% (78) said yes, and 16% (15) said sort of.

“There is no one else black in my ballet class, so I always felt different, but now I don't because there are other black dancers too.” (Child participant, comment supplied by library service)

“Glad that our library service are featuring black artists in this predominantly white area.”
(Participant, main survey)

Inclusive & inspiring

Members of the public and library staff also made frequent reference to the accessible nature of the events, and the kind, encouraging, and patient way that staff from Oxygen Arts and professional dancers engaged with audience members and participants:

“It was thrilling and thought provoking. My neurodiverse granddaughter sat still for 30 minutes in a ballet - a first! We both enjoyed it hugely.” (Participant, main survey)

“A majority received the events very positively, saying they felt welcomed and comfortable, and left empowered. This was especially true of the dance workshop. They felt honoured to meet and learn from a professional. One mother was so touched that her daughter in a wheelchair could participate in a dance class that she took the extra effort of emailing to thank us.” (Library service lead)

“Beautiful performance and such a privilege to hear the panel ... I thought the panel were exceptionally patient in answering questions.” (Participant, main survey)

Overall, this inclusive atmosphere, together with the mix of images, personal stories, history, movement and music seems to have created a really powerful, moving, and inspiring set of experiences:

“I ... found the focus on celebration of Black dance talent incredibly inspiring.” (Participant, main survey)

“Made me want to cry, but so inspiring!” (Participant, main survey)

Reception for specific activities

Exhibition

Feedback on the exhibition was very positive. Members of the public found it fascinating to read about the lives and careers of individual dancers and to learn more about the ballet industry as a whole. Many people praised the quality of the images in the exhibition which they found beautiful and powerful. The few critical comments that were received about the exhibition mostly focused on its positioning in the library, which some people felt was insufficiently prominent. A couple of people said they would have liked to have seen some additional items displayed as part of the exhibition (e.g. some ballet outfits).

“We had excellent feedback from library customers who viewed the exhibition. People commented that there was so much great information and amazing photographs. People enjoyed soaking up all the information ...” (Library service lead)

“It was interesting and educational. I read the same things I was told as a child in the 1960s early 1970s that we do not have black ballet dancers as not aesthetically pleasing, distract the eye if you are in the corps de ballet ...” (Participant, main survey)

“Really interesting and inspiring exhibition. Should be given more prominence, couldn’t see any sign advertising it outside or in the foyer of the library.” (Participant, main survey)

Island Movements show

Comments on the show were hugely positive. It was common for respondents to the main participant survey to say it had been a pleasure and a privilege to see professional dancers performing in their local library, in such an intimate setting. For many people, it was their first experience of ballet. However, even those who had been to the ballet before tended to contrast *Island Movements* favourably with other shows they had seen. Audience members praised the show for its accessibility, strong narrative and emotional power, quality of dancing, interesting fusion of dance styles, and its music. Comments on the after-show Q&A were also extremely positive, with members of the public appreciating the chance to unpack some of the show’s themes with the artistic team as well as other audience members. The very few critical comments that were received tended to focus on technical aspects of the staging, with some people saying they found the chairs uncomfortable, couldn’t see the dancers’ feet if they were seated beyond the front row (without a stage or tiered/raised seating), the lights were not dimmed for the performance, or they couldn’t hear the Q&A well without a microphone:

“... A particular highlight was The Island Movements ballet performance and Q&A, which brought high-quality ballet and direct interaction with the performers and choreographer into one of our ... [venues]. This was a unique and memorable experience for participants and a significant achievement for our local cultural offer.” (Library service lead)

“I loved it! It was such a privilege to watch ballet en pointe in such a small, intimate venue. I think the after-show talk was as important and enjoyable as the performance. I learned a lot - especially from the stories of people who had personally experienced Windrush but also the stories of life as black ballet dancers.” (Participant, main survey)

“Amazing, beautiful dancing, fabulous music and story was portrayed so well. Loved the Q&A after, was moved by Patrick [Williams] and the dancers’ stories.” (Participant, main survey)

“... Our group of school children really enjoyed the performance. Most children have never had the chance to see ballet in real life. It was a great to be invited along.” (Participant, main survey)

“I would pay to see these four dancers perform again. The staging of the event, without a platform for the dancers, meant I couldn’t see what their feet were doing. This reduced the impact of the dancing.” (Participant, main survey)

Presentations & talks

The presentation and In Conversation and Panel events were also very well received, with members of the public appreciating the opportunity to learn more about the history of Black British Ballet and professional dancers’ experiences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, comments suggest audiences for these events may have been more knowledgeable about the subject matter, but attendance seems to have been rewarding for people regardless of their level of prior understanding. There were very few critical comments about these events, however a few people said they found it difficult to hear the conversation because of the quality of sound systems and / or noise from members of the audience (it was suggested some ground-rules might have been helpful). A couple of people would have liked to have seen more photographs or film clips to accompany the talks:

“The presentation was absolutely brilliant in terms of content, Dr Bourne sharing her story, her passion and ideas for the future. I attended with my daughter who was a dancer and hope she found

it inspiring listening to a dancer who ... looks like her, thank you so much." (Participant, BBBP presentation, main survey)

"It was a joy to listen to the panellists and learn about their experiences. I enjoy watching ballet but do not know much about it, so learnt a lot". (Participant, Panel event, main survey)

"The talk by Brenda Garratt-Glassman was very interesting. Although I knew about the struggles of Black British dancers back in the 1970s and 80s, I didn't realise the extent of their exclusion." (Library service lead, In Conversation)

"The Darren Panton event was ... very well received ... He was very engaging and really made people stop and think. We received a huge amount of positive feedback ..." (Library service lead, In Conversation)

"I loved it, it was so interesting to hear about Darren's experiences, which made me feel impressed at how he stuck at it and how he now wants to make things easier for young black girls and boys." (Participant, In Conversation, main survey)

Ballet & dance workshops

There was extremely positive feedback about both the classical ballet workshop, and the dance workshop, lecture and Q&A. Participants found it refreshing and thrilling to find dance classes in their local library. There was consistently good feedback about how inclusive the workshops felt and how encouraging the tutors were of dancers of all abilities and ages. Older people said they appreciated the opportunity to reconnect with dance and movement. Parents commented on how much their children had enjoyed both types of workshop. Feedback from children and young people themselves is only available for the ballet workshop, but it's clear they enjoyed taking part and learning new moves and routines. There were virtually no negative comments provided. One adult said the session was a bit crowded so their child could not see very well from the back. Young people who commented said they would have liked more or longer sessions, and opportunities to learn more moves or positions:

"The classical ballet workshop received excellent feedback, the participants could have listened to Shevelle all night! Many emailed me direct after the session to say they would love more and enjoyed the opportunity to try dance in the library in a safe environment." (Library service lead, ballet workshop)

"My daughter has never tried ballet before, and this was a wonderful introduction. She was smiling and enthused all the way through and inspired to ask questions." (Parent, ballet workshop, comment supplied by library service)

"I really liked when we did the choreography. It was super, super fun!" (Participant, ballet workshop, survey for children aged 5-11)

[Describe the workshop in three words] *"Amazing, Refreshing, Inspiring!"* (Participant, ballet workshop, survey for children aged 11-18)

"Now aged 61 years old. Started ballet and tap aged 3 years, stopped at 15 years. Walk with a cane (dancer feet) but still can walk en pointe. Some things you never forget!" (Participant, ballet workshop, main survey)

“Dancer did a great job getting everyone dancing, even the more wary!” (Participant, dance workshop, main survey)

Photography workshop

The photography workshops were very well received by people of all ages, especially with some of the young people who took part. Participants appreciated the opportunity to gain experience using professional equipment and to learn some new skills. The fact that the workshops had a professional dancer as a model was a highlight for many. The few critical comments received related to having the equipment ready to go before the start of the workshop, and a desire for a few more props and a little more direction and feedback from the tutor:

“The dance photography was good, as that was something that people didn’t expect from a library unlike lectures, creative writing etc.” (Library service lead)

“The teacher of the photography students pointed out that they would not otherwise have had access to such professional equipment.” (Library service lead)

“Wonderful! Really good to have some theory, then ... lots of time to take photos and experiment. Brilliant to have Adrielly dancing and posing, and Clovis was a ... fun tutor - both really generous.” Participant, main survey)

[Describe the workshop in three words] *“Creative, inspirational, imaginative.”* (Participant, survey for children aged 11-18)

“Excellent analogies and explanation of exposure triangle and practical activity of photographing movement. Really talented ballet dancer and photographer!” (Participant, main survey)

“... more direction for students needed from the photographer. Once the workshop had been going for 30 minutes or so, the students gained confidence and it began to flow ...” (Participant, main survey)

Onisere story-telling

The *Onisere* story-telling sessions seem to have been very well-received by most participants. Some adult respondents to the main survey said they felt the session should have been pitched at slightly older children given its length. Quite a few (adult and child) respondents felt the session really came alive towards the end, when the children had the chance to move and dance. In general, the sessions seemed to have worked best with school groups, as children in families tended to be less confident in taking part and so ended up sitting down for long periods. A few participants said they would have appreciated the opportunity to meet some of the dancers as part of this event:

“The schools attending the Onisere workshops were incredibly enthusiastic about this, and all seemed to not only have an engaging and enjoyable experience, but also learned some important lessons too ...” (Library service lead)

“Loved the children's storybook!” (Participant, main survey)

[The best bit was] ... *“When we all came up to the front and did some dancing, I really enjoyed it.”* (Participant, survey for children aged 5-11)

“The session was a bit long for younger participants and would have been good to get more quickly to moving to music.” (Adult accompanying child participant, main survey)

“I think ... the story was more suitable for older children.” (Adult accompanying child participant, main survey)

“Myself, my 6-yr old and my 4-yr old really enjoyed the storytelling workshop. For this age group, however, there wasn’t an opportunity to meet any of the dancers from Black British ballet or see them dance. I thought this was a shame.” (Adult accompanying child participant, main survey)

Creative writing workshop

The creative writing workshops received very positive feedback from most people who responded to the surveys. Participants seem to have enjoyed the informative content and the chance to interact with other participants during group work. The few critical comments related to the length of inputs and number of tasks (some participants felt these could have been shorter / more focused). One or two of the younger participants would have liked even more teamwork / discussion as well as use of photos as inputs:

“An eye-opening and informative creative writing class.” (Participant, main survey)

“I enjoyed exploring the challenge of following your passion, the opportunity to learn about Black British Ballet dancers, the choice of what style of writing to participate with.” (Participant, main survey)

“Marsha is really inspiring!” (Participant, survey for children aged 11-18)

“Fun, informative and incredibly inspiring.” (Participant, survey for children aged 11-18)

“Engaging because of group work activity. Interesting content, informative and educational - I liked that the speaker talked about dancers she knew personally.” (Participant, main survey)

“Some of the input felt a bit long but when it came to the writing task it had all helped ... tricky to involve such a wide age range too.” (Participant, main survey)

VR talks & experiences

Feedback on the VR talks was mostly positive. Challenges with the use of VR headsets (highlighted in the previous chapter) meant that many respondents were unable to fully explore this element of the programme, which they felt was a shame. However, those that were able to use the headsets seem to have really enjoyed the experience. While one person found that using the headsets gave her a headache, others praised the experience as a gentle and accessible introduction to VR (see the Redbridge case study on pages 12-13 for more details):

“Interesting, but a shame we did not have the VR sets to see it in action.” (Participant, main survey)

“I really enjoyed it. I felt like I was in a private gallery experience. It was really informative. Please do another one. It was so helpful because I am dyslexic and dyspraxic ...” (Participant, main survey)

“Very interesting. Took a few minutes to get used to the VR headset but after that, what I saw was really good ... Really liked the performance at the end of my session. Very nice surprise!” (Participant, main survey)

“Brilliant ballet dancing and VR experience.” (Participant, main survey)

“Inspired me to look into creating VR experiences.” (Participant, main survey)

Ratings for specific activities¹⁵

| BBB offer | No.s engaging (library survey) | Types of people (library survey) | Ratings (main participant survey, 410 respondents, from 21 services) | Ratings (5-11-yr old participant survey, 228 respondents, from 9 services) | Ratings (11-18-yr old participant survey, 103 respondents from 8 services) |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Exhibition | 44,716 (est., data from 18 of 29 services) Plus 91 (VR exhib. Redbridge) | Range of library users | Very good: 70 Good: 37 Fair: 5 Poor: 0 Very poor: 1 | | |
| Island Movements show | 1796 (data from all 11 services) | 17% (298) under 18 10% (171) adults 74% (1327) age unknown | Very good: 130 Good: 13 Fair: 3 Poor: 0 Very poor: 1 | | |
| Dance workshop | 853 (data from 15 of 17 services) | 77% (656) under 18 19% (159) adults 4% (38) age unknown | Very good: 34 Good: 12 Fair: 1 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 | | |
| Classical Ballet workshop | 312 (data from 12 of 14 services) | 65% (202) under 18 13% (42) adults 22% (68) age unknown | Very good: 44 Good: 8 Fair: 1 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 | Very good: 22 Good: 14 Fair: 3 Poor: 1 Very poor: 0 | Very good: 36 Good: 10 Fair: 2 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 |
| Onisere story-telling (4-8 years) | 1800 (data from all 24 services) | 85% (1524) under 18 5% (85) adults 11% (191) age unknown | Very good: 16 Good: 11 Fair: 4 Poor: 3 Very poor: 0 | Very good: 87 Good: 76 Fair: 16 Poor: 1 Very poor: 0 | Very good: 0 Good: 1 Fair: 0 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 |
| Panel event | 23 (data from both/2 services) | 0% (0) under 18 48% (11) adults 52% (12) age unknown | Very good: 10 Good: 3 Fair: 0 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 | | |
| In Conversation with a BBBP dancer | 140 (data from all 7 services) | 3% (4) under 18 4% (5) adults 94% (131) age unknown | Very good: 44 Good: 8 Fair: 3 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 | | |
| BBBP presentation from Dr Bourne | 198 (data from all 8 services) | 48% (95) under 18 30% (59) adults 22% (44) age unknown | Very good: 39 Good: 16 Fair: 2 Poor: 0 Very poor: 1 | Very good: 1 Good: 0 Fair: 0 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 | |
| Dance photography workshop | 281 (data from 17 of 19 services) | 19% (53) under 18 42% (118) adults | Very good: 34 Good: 1 Fair: 0 Poor: 0 | | Very good: 19 Good: 6 Fair: 0 Poor: 0 |

¹⁵ See all caveats for engagement figures in the previous chapter. Some young people may have chosen to complete the main survey, or done so before the two specific surveys for younger ages were designed. It is also possible that some surveys for children and young people have been completed by parents, carers, or teachers.

| BBB offer | No.s engaging (library survey) | Types of people (library survey) | Ratings (main participant survey, 410 respondents, from 21 services) | Ratings (5-11-yr old participant survey, 228 respondents, from 9 services) | Ratings (11-18-yr old participant survey, 103 respondents from 8 services) |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| (14 years - adult) | | 39% (110) age unknown | Very poor: 0 | | Very poor: 0 |
| Creative writing workshop (9-16 years) | 364 (data from 17 of 18 services) | 87% (316) under 18 5% (19) adults 8% (29) age unknown | Very good: 21 Good: 13 Fair: 1 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 | Very good: 2 Good: 2 Fair: 0 Poor: 0 Very poor: 2 | Very good: 6 Good: 1 Fair: 0 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 |
| Creating a VR experience (online) ¹⁶ | 7 (data from sole/1 service) | 0% (0) under 18 0% (0) adults 100% (7) age unknown | Very good: 9 Good: 4 Fair: 1 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 | | |
| Creating a VR experience (in-person) ¹⁷ | 15 (data from both/2 services) | 20% (3) under 18 80% (12) adults 0% (0) age unknown | Very good: 3 Good: 0 Fair: 2 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 | | Very good: 0 Good: 5 Fair: 10 Poor: 0 Very poor: 0 |
| Totals | 5789 (data excludes exhibition) | 54% (3151) under 18 12% (681) adults 34% (1957) age unknown | | | |

¹⁶ There are anomalies in the numbers of participants reported by libraries and numbers responding to the main participant survey. It may be that some participants are referring to the VR exhibition rather than the online talk on this topic, and/or participant surveys may have been completed after library surveys were submitted.

¹⁷ There are anomalies in the numbers of participants reported by libraries and numbers responding to the participant surveys. It may be that some participants are referring to the VR exhibition rather than the in-person talk on this topic, and/or participant surveys may have been received after library surveys were submitted.

Case study: Calderdale

Calderdale Council manages a network of 12 libraries across the borough. The Black British Ballet Project (BBBP) was hosted at the main Central Library, in Halifax, between October 2024 and April 2025. In addition to the exhibition and *Island Movements* performance, BBBP provided dance, photography, and creative writing workshops, as well as storytelling sessions and a talk with one of the BBBP dancers. Activities were very well received, especially with school-aged children who were a key target audience. More widely, the Project has helped to change conceptions about what a library can be and do within the Council and the community. Calderdale's involvement was led by David Duffy, Libraries Manager, and Roberta Crossley, Team Leader for West Calderdale Libraries. David and Roberta spoke to this author in September 2025.

About the library service

David: "We're in West Yorkshire ... we're basically two valleys, with ... a lot of the population around Halifax ... which is the largest ... conurbation ... It's a very mixed area ... with different communities ... we've got ... Hebden Bridge, which is known as one of the funkier places in the world! ... We've got the award-winning Piece Hall in Halifax, which is becoming nationally and internationally known, with big name artists coming ... but Halifax is where some of the deprivation is too ... We've got the areas which were about traditional manufacturing ... you're talking about the mills, the chimneys in the past. But we're also known for the countryside ... because we've actually got a relatively small population against the land area ... We have lower levels of people who don't class themselves as White British and ... who identify as Black in Calderdale, but in some ways, that makes it even more important to engage with their history in a positive way."

Roberta: "We do a lot of work with young people in schools ... that's a key priority, and we have a team that lead on that. And we are heavily involved with Valley and Library of Sanctuary ... we work closely with our local refugee community, with St. Augustine's, which is based in Halifax ... and as we have quite a few pockets of deprivation in Calderdale ... we do outreach work ... a lot of school visits to target children that don't have the opportunity to go to the library ... so it's all that ... along with the day job, which is the general public and the people who do come into libraries."

Motivations for taking part

David: "We were very, very keen to get involved in the project as soon as it was mentioned. Michelle Alford, the Director of Hull Libraries, was leading on it as far as Yorkshire and Humber is concerned. After Michelle mentioned it at one of our meetings, I dropped that email straight away to say 'this sounds really good ... we would be interested in being involved' ... Now, the reason why ... being involved ... was so important was, one, our commitment to Libraries of Sanctuary ... But from the ballet side too, there's a history here ... For a while Northern Ballet was based in Halifax. Until they got a better offer from Leeds! ... But there's a little bit of a tradition here ... at our theatre, the Victoria Theatre, there's good attendances for ballet ... It was also the opportunity to work with people ... to look at who we're targeting. So, a lot of it was schools ... but Central Library serves the town centre in Halifax ... including some wards that have high levels of deprivation. So, it was really ... looking at the arts as a way to reach people ... And it was on the back of our Year of Culture ... that was a driver too ... and it meant there was a chance to get support for ... activities because of that."

Activities and engagement

David: "We had the ...*Island Movements* show ... that was absolutely fantastic! ... Our Chief Executive came ... and he put his comments in the general Council newsletter ... We also had positive comments from one of our main contacts at Valley of Sanctuary ... there was so much positivity."

Roberta: "Initially we felt a bit of pressure ... to have the show at the theatre, which would hold hundreds, of course ... but it was really important to us that it was delivered in the library ... to make the association with the library ... that libraries are arts and creative venues ... We had an invited audience ... we worked with two primary schools, and to see their faces in reaction to the performance was absolutely fantastic! ... That was in October ... and then there was a gap to the exhibition ... in December ... Around then ... we had three workshops ... creative writing, photography, and the children's storytelling session, which was packed out! ...

The photography ... that was aimed at a slightly older audience and that ... sold out as well ... Then there was a gap until ... April ... when we did the contemporary dance class and talk with a dancer."

David: *"It was helpful to have the mix of activities ... we would have liked to have taken on more! There were ... things that we put into it as well ... like we commissioned a professional photographer to take pictures ... to help with marketing, promotion, and the archive ... and we used a lot of them on the network ... to get the message across to the rest of the team who weren't involved in this."*

Highlights

Roberta: *"I think the Island Movements show, and the photography were my two highlights ... It was such a powerful performance ... and it was so unique to have that in our library space ... And equally, the photography, which was very different, but there was just such good engagement ... And the range of people that were in that room, all ages, and some people who were very, very shy, and they were really coming out of themselves when they were taking the photographs and sharing them with each other ... So those were my two favourites."*

David: *"The Island Movements ... I can't say any more about that ... it was something you just had to experience! ... But the children's story-telling session ... it was a similar experience ... the creative writing too. I think everything worked really well. And you know, the quality! ... Sometimes there's a bit of scepticism about free events ... but this was such good quality."*

Impact on / lasting legacy for the library service

David: *"I think the legacy is ... the message about what ... libraries can do. We're very keen on them being seen as community hubs ... that's the message we've been trying to get over to other teams."*

Roberta: *"Yes, absolutely, and that we don't all walk around whispering and telling people to shush anymore! We're trying to banish that myth!"*

David: *"It's about offering that chance to experience culture ... research shows, especially in relation to children ... their first cultural experiences are often in relation to a library. So, if we can make that experience as wide as possible, that's a good thing, especially in those areas where maybe the scene is more deprived."*

Roberta: *"We'd never really had anything like this before ... this was unique ... and a bit of a learning curve for us as well, what was needed for a ballet, because we hadn't realised about the height of the room, for instance! ... So, we learned a lot ... It was quite hard work, because you've got to get a lot of things together, but if it were possible, we would have it again tomorrow!"*

David: *"None of this would have been developed ... without Libraries Connected being there to ... pull everything together and provide the support ... the enabling role they play is really important."*

Looking to the future

David: *"We were thinking, and we still may do this, of creating 'an exhibition from the exhibition' ... because there are some really brilliant photographs ... including by somebody who came to the photographic workshop ... he gave us all his photographs, and they're amazing! ... I've also been talking to ... colleagues in cultural services, because they're working on a new bid related to ballet ... I've written something ... about Black British Ballet ... that they're hoping to include ... So ... hopefully they'll be more work in relation to this ... to raise the profile of ballet."*

Roberta: *"It's been great and we're really hoping it does lead to other things for the future."*

4. Impact & legacy

Impact & legacy for participants / the public

This evaluation focused on capturing immediate reactions to Black British Ballet activities rather than lasting impacts on members of the public. However, responses to the participant surveys hint at some ways in which the programme may continue to resonate with people:

Learning about history & heritage

There is clear evidence that members of the public (as well as library staff) have learned a great deal about an important part of our cultural history and heritage which has been largely hidden from view. Comments from respondents to the main participant survey suggest that most people had little prior knowledge of the history of ballet, of Black ballet in particular and, in many cases, of wider issues affecting Black communities in the UK. Programme events appear to have been revelatory for these people, while also offering new perspectives on history and heritage for those with greater prior understanding:

“Fascinating to find out about something I knew nothing about.” (Participant, exhibition, main survey)

“It was fascinating to read the individual career stories and to see the interactions between dance companies over time. I had not previously appreciated what a pivotal role Dance Theatre of Harlem played in the careers of so many Black British dancers.” (Participant, exhibition, main survey)

“Through attending this event, I have found out about some more black dancers that are paving the way for other black ... upcoming and/or aspiring dancers. I now have the names of these dancers and can conduct my own research about them and their journey.” (Participant, BBBP presentation, main survey)

“The show was so wonderful. The ladies performing a ballet ... telling the story about the Windrush experience of our mothers and fathers who came to the UK. How we were treated ... also what we have done for the UK, our hard work, determination. It is good to put on performances that educate people and also bring joy and happiness to put a smile on people's faces.” (Participant, show, main survey)

Skills

Participants responding to both children's surveys (for 5-11 and 11-18-year-olds) felt they had developed some new skills as a result of taking part in programme activity. The particular skills depended on the activity children had been involved in but included: dancing; story-telling; writing; communications; and team-working. Some older children also felt they had developed skills in VR and photography.

There is plenty of evidence that adult participants have learned new skills too, for example:

"I really enjoyed the delivery of the workshop, informal, encouraging and enthusiastic. I learned a few ... positions, choreography and how to work in partnerships and as a group ..." (Participant, dance workshop, main survey)

"Pitched perfectly for my basic camera knowledge. I thought it would be very professional and high level, but it added to my current knowledge nicely ..." (Participant, photography workshop, main survey)

Commitment to creativity, & to inclusion in the arts

Feedback suggests that taking part in programme activities may have inspired many people to begin, restart, or continue with their ballet / dance practice or wider creative pursuits. Some people also seem to feel more fired up to advocate for greater equality within arts and creative spaces as a result of the programme:

"Patrick mentioned a couple of children should take up dance as they had 'that something'. I hope something comes from this for the children's future." (Library service lead, dance workshop)

"It helped encourage me to stay on a path of performance." (Participant, main survey)

"...Will look for ballet classes/other opps in [name of place] now!" (Participant, main survey)

"Well, I think [I'll] ... restart my creative journey - despite my older age!" (Participant, main survey)

"The event made me appreciate how a story can be told through dance and the dancing styles were wonderful to watch. I need to go and see more ballet / dance performances." (Participant, main survey)

"As a dancer and researcher, I truly appreciate this incredible exhibition. It inspires me to continue advocating for black African dance practices that have been understudied within their communities to be included in academic discourse." (Participant, main survey)

"As a white person, I feel this exhibition has reminded me of the importance of diversity within a cultural milieu." (Participant, main survey)

Confidence & empowerment

Many Black audience members and participants, and people of mixed heritage, said that taking part in the programme has validated their experiences and reinforced a sense of pride in their identity. A wider group of people said they felt more confident, motivated, and inspired to explore and pursue their dreams:

"Felt inspired after attending, and had some of my own experiences of discrimination validated." (Participant, main survey)

"This event enabled me to feel even prouder of my history and culture and further proof we are not monolith." (Participant, main survey)

"Has helped my confidence and inspired me to be more creative." (Participant, main survey)

"Made me think more about my future." (Participant, main survey)

“This event has inspired me to keep pushing for what I want as not only is it possible, but it has been done before by others that look like myself.” (Participant, main survey)

Connections to community

It was common for respondents to the main participant survey to say that the programme had fostered a sense of community and belonging. Some people reported increased pride in the diversity of their local area. Others said they felt motivated to do more to challenge and change their local area as a result of what they had heard and experienced:

“... I feel it has a place-making element to showcase such a rated performance from the arts.”
(Participant, main survey)

“It made me feel part of the local community, there were lots of different people there, all happy together.” (Participant, main survey)

“I am glad that Redbridge is so diverse and we get to share cultures and learn from each other.”
(Participant, main survey)

“It was amazing to feel that our little community is connected to big moments in history.”
(Participant, main survey)

“I think more diverse stories in York ... is very important ... the Q&A afterwards was very good. I think it helped develop the understanding of some of the audience.”

“I feel there is still quite a lot of overt and covert racism in [name of area] and not enough challenging it.” (Participant, main survey)

Connections to the library

Evidence from the participant surveys suggests that taking part in the programme has also shifted perceptions of what local libraries are for and can do. Many people said they had a greater appreciation of the importance of libraries, and / or that libraries now felt like more fun and interesting places to spend time.

In the main participant survey, 95% (352) of respondents said they would be keen to see more of these types of activities locally¹⁸. In the same survey, 83% (303) said the events had inspired them to participate in more library activities in future¹⁹. Several people said they had already signed up for library newsletters to keep a closer eye on what was coming up.

Children also expressed an interest in taking part in more similar activities in future. In the younger children’s survey (5-11-year-olds), 83% (183) said they would like to do this²⁰. The activities younger children wanted to take part in, or the topics they wanted to learn about, ranged widely (from sport,

¹⁸ Of the 410 respondents to the main participant survey, 372 answered this question. Of these, 95% (352) said yes, 0.3% (1) said no, and 5% (19) said they weren’t sure.

¹⁹ Of the 410 respondents to the main participant survey, 363 answered this question. Of these, 83% (303) said yes, 4% (13) said no, and 13% (47) said they weren’t sure.

²⁰ Of the 228 respondents to the younger children’s survey (5-11-year-olds), 220 answered this question. Of these, 83% (183) said yes, 4% (9) said no, and 13% (28) said maybe.

to space, to dinosaurs), but dancing featured heavily in their answers. In the older children’s survey (11-18-year-olds), 82% said they would be keen to take part in similar activities in future²¹.

“I am really impressed that the library put this on.” (Participant, main survey)

“I ... didn't know that libraries could put on such involved performance.” (Participant, main survey)

“It made me realise once again how important libraries are to their communities and the benefits they can bring by opening their doors to events such as this ...” (Participant, main survey)

“Great to see the library diversify to remain relevant to its community.” (Participant, main survey)

“I feel this event makes [the] library a more fun place to be in.” (Participant, main survey)

“Signed up to newsletter so I don't miss other library events.” (Participant, main survey)

“I didn't know these kind of events happened here. I will keep a lookout from now on.” (Participant, main survey)

Impact & legacy for library services

Overall ratings

| Rating for impact on service (5 is top) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| No. of library services | 1 | 0 | 13 | 6 | 9 |

Median score is 4, mean is 3.8, based on 29 library services

Views about the impact of the programme on, and legacy for, participating library services vary, but most libraries report at least some positive impacts which seem likely to be lasting (with some reporting many).

Staff & volunteer engagement

In most library services, the BBB programme was run by staff, with only five services (of the 26 responding to a survey question on this topic) involving volunteers²². Several library leads said they felt the programme had important benefits in terms of staff engagement and enthusiasm. Some also noted that staff had appreciated the opportunity to take part in activities, learn about the issues, and develop some new skills, alongside members of the public (see the Bracknell case study on pages 24-25 for more detail on volunteer engagement):

“... In terms of staff ... it's been really great ... the workshops ... stuck with a lot of people ... the ... joy and the feeling of community that it brought ...”

²¹ Of the 103 respondents to the older children’s survey (11-18-year-olds), 77 answered this question. Of these, 82% (63) said yes, 6% (5) said no, and 12% (9) said maybe.

²² Twenty six out of 29 library services provided data on the number of volunteers taking part in the programme, with only five services involving volunteers. These services involved 21 volunteers, with 10 being involved at a single library service. This same service generated 30 of the 78 total volunteer hours reported.

“Staff were very interested in the exhibition and events, and engaging staff in events like this is always a win.”

“Volunteers really enjoyed listening to one ballet dancer give a talk. It made them feel valued being invited to a special event for volunteers.”

“[Some] members of staff brought along their family ... to the dance and story workshops to make the most of this opportunity to join dance classes free of charge in the library.”

“...Two of our staff members took part in the photography workshops and learned about photographing a moving image.”

Reinforcing the importance of diversity

Many library service leads felt that participating in the BBB programme had helped to reinforce the importance of a focus on diversity in the minds of staff:

“It's raised awareness of the subject matter amongst staff, and seems to have reminded them that cultural background remains a factor in involvement with the arts.”

“It was a poignant reminder to the team of how important it is that the Black community (and others) take part in shaping how their stories are told, ensuring their voices are heard and celebrating their contributions”

Staff & volunteer skills

Half (15) of the participating library services reported improvements in staff skills as a result of taking part in the programme. Three services reported improvements in volunteer skills.

The vast majority of comments regarding improvements in skills relate to the management of projects and programmes and the marketing and hosting of cultural events. Some services felt that staff are now clearer about how to set up and run complex projects, including the questions to ask and information to request at different stages to ensure success. Many services felt staff had learned about how to create targeted communications and marketing campaigns to reach different parts of their community. Several services said that experiences on the programme had prompted them to rethink their approach to managing attendance specifically. Some services felt that staff had gained useful insights into how to use and adapt library spaces to best effect when running community events. Taken together, these skills and insights were reported to have led to increased confidence to take on more cultural programmes and events in future, even where staff have little prior knowledge of the themes and issues involved:

“It was a good experience for me as a new member of the team to see what sorts of information are essential in order for a programme to run smoothly and for staff to feel confident, which I will take with me going forward.”

“Working with Black British Ballet offered staff valuable opportunities to gain experience in delivering culturally specific, high-quality arts activity that is not normally part of our core programme. This included gaining confidence in event management within community settings ... We also developed new skills around audience outreach. We used AI tools ... to help compile sector-specific mailing lists and identify community groups to contact and target through our ... PR ...”

“... We have had to consider why our publicity didn't have the impact we wished and have learned lessons to take forward for future events.”

“Staff [are] more confident in supporting and participating in events and activities that they have little knowledge of.”

“We're getting really good at running ... and hosting events of all types!”

Relationships with local partners

Most library services reported that taking part in the BBB programme had helped them to establish some valuable new relationships with local partners and / or to strengthen relationships that already existed. Most commonly, library services reported new or strengthened links with schools. However, services also highlighted links with community groups, ESOL providers, art and dance groups, theatres, leisure trusts, and local radio. Services were enthusiastic about what might come from these links in future. In a few cases, relationships had already yielded tangible results:

“It has certainly helped develop a link with a local school, in particular the art department and 6th form. They are very close to one of our [venues] but don't engage. By offering them the opportunity to come to the photography workshop we are now exploring other ways we can work together.”

“We have ... strengthened channels of communication with local schools' librarians, and other service providers.”

“One highlight for us is that it built a stronger relationship with a local primary school which has the most ethnically diverse students in the town.”

“We have managed to engage with a number of schools which we have previously struggled to form links with, we have also formed relationships with other organisations such as dance groups.”

“... We ... established a valuable new connection with BBC Radio ... [that] has opened the door for future PR and promotional opportunities with the station. The programme also enabled us to build a meaningful and ongoing relationship with [our local] Camera Club. Representatives attended the ... photography workshop and commented on the exceptional quality of the session. This has led to ... discussions around volunteering to photograph some of our future events, exploring potential income-generation opportunities, and planning a ... photography exhibition ...”

Relationships with other libraries, Libraries Connected, and Oxygen Arts

Some library leads highlighted relationships they had been able to forge with other participating library services, and with the programme partners, which they hoped would lead to other things in future:

“As we partnered with Rotherham ... on this, we felt it helped strengthen our relationship with them.” (Sheffield Libraries lead)

“[Our] ... librarians took over ... much of the programme ... This led to librarians making useful contacts with Libraries Connected and other libraries.”

“Taking part in the Black British Ballet Project enabled us to develop several new relationships and strengthen existing ones with key partners and community groups. We deepened our relationship with Oxygen Arts, working closely with them throughout the programme and building a strong foundation for future collaboration.”

Importance of libraries

Echoing comments made by members of the public (above), library leads also emphasised the value of taking part in the programme in elevating the profile of libraries (within the community, with partners, and with local councils) and changing perceptions of what libraries are for and can do:

“The ballet performance and the project ... highlighted the flexibility of our libraries to provide many things to many people, and the important role they play in our culture. The project ... demonstrated that we can ... deliver important opportunities for the community and partners.”

“... It’s the message about what ... libraries can do ... expanding ideas about what a library is ...”

“It certainly made people think, ‘oh, look what a library can offer!’”

Impact & legacy for programme partners

Libraries Connected

This was one of the first times that Libraries Connected had trialled this way of working in which it supported heads of service to create and secure funding for a new initiative, and then held a central pot of funding to deliver a national programme of cultural activity over an extended period of time. The programme has generated a great deal of learning, which has already been shared across the organisation to inform other projects and programmes that are underway (see Chapter Six for more details). It is also beginning to shape the way Libraries Connected is approaching new pieces of work. (Libraries Connected has created a new delivery model template which can be drawn from when designing future programmes and writing funding bids, alongside lessons learned from this programme). Overall, experiences on the programme have confirmed the value of this new way of working, which the organisation would like to continue piloting in other areas.

Oxygen Arts

For Oxygen Arts, this programme was an opportunity to take the stories of Black British dance professionals to a much wider audience, continue to build relationships with libraries, and develop some new offers. The organisation is pleased to have had the opportunity to work with a much wider range of libraries, many of which it had not worked with before. It has also developed a more detailed understanding of what Libraries Connected does and how it operates. The opportunity to speak at Libraries Connected events, and reach heads of service across the country, has been particularly valuable. The programme has already unlocked some new opportunities for Oxygen Arts to support groups of libraries in London and the South-East.

The programme has also been an opportunity for Oxygen Arts to raise the profile of the BBBP beyond the library sector²³. Notably, English National Ballet requested that the exhibition be displayed at their London headquarters in 2024 and 2025, and the exhibition was also loaned to the Royal Ballet School for display to their students and visitors, ensuring that even more people had an opportunity to engage with this history. Delivering the programme has also informed the team’s thinking about how the BBBP might develop in future. In particular, it has given the team new insight into the challenges of involving young people in ballet, which will prove useful in on-going activity to influence the ballet industry, and confirmed the value of working closely with communities to overcome barriers to participation.

²³ See Appendix 4 for some of the positive media coverage the programme has achieved.

Legacy activities

One of NLHF's stipulations was that all digital outputs it funds need to be available to the public, accessible, and openly licenced. Unfortunately, Oxygen Arts were unable to clear the rights for the online exhibition to be available under a Creative Commons licence²⁴. However, all digital outputs from this programme will be freely available online once the exhibition tour has ended (see below).

Finally, one obvious way in which the programme will continue to have a legacy is through an extension to the touring exhibition. Over the Summer of 2025, aware of a potential underspend (due to cancellations) and concerned to ensure the programme had a legacy, partners began planning for the exhibition to continue touring to other library services. Thirty-two services expressed an interest in taking the exhibition as part of an extension tour through to March 2027. This includes three library services that have already hosted the exhibition and are keen to welcome it back. While this time the exhibition will tour without the funded project management support provided as part of this programme, Libraries Connected will provide as much support as it can to help ensure this is a success. Oxygen Arts are also seeking additional funding to provide a limited activity programme to participating libraries. The Libraries Connected team are particularly pleased that the extension tour will include some Welsh libraries, as they weren't involved in the original schedule.

²⁴ With the NHLF grant, Oxygen Arts purchased non-commercial licences for pre-existing images and film for display in the exhibition and online. The rights holders of the images would not grant partners a licence to cover anyone who wanted to use their images under the Creative Commons licence, at any price. The archive film rights holders were willing to grant partners a commercial licence, but not one that covered anyone who viewed the footage online. In light of this, Oxygen Arts purchased a non-profit licence because the commercial rates for footage were considerable, NHLF made it clear that they were not inclined to pay excessive fees for rights, and neither Oxygen Arts nor Libraries Connected had plans to use the films for profit. Partners decided not to purchase footage from another rights supplier because their prices were even higher.

5. Conclusions & summary of learning

Overall assessment

| Rating for overall satisfaction (5 is top) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| No. of library services | 0 | 0 | 7 | 9 | 13 |

Median score is 4, mean is 4.2, based on 29 library services

“Overall, the programme has significantly strengthened our partnerships across arts, media and community groups, creating new opportunities for collaboration, visibility and shared activity.”
(Library service lead)

“Overall, we were very happy with the programme and the quality of the offer, and it stretched our marketing and content in new directions. We would like to be involved in future opportunities, and want to thank everyone involved wholeheartedly for the massive amount of hard work we know this will have taken to make happen.” (Library service lead)

Reach of the programme, reception & satisfaction

From October 2024 to the end of 2025, Libraries Connected and Oxygen Arts worked together to take the *Into the Light* exhibition, and a range of accompanying events, to 29 library services across England. Conservative estimates suggest that across c. 210 events, the programme has created 5789 opportunities to engage with Black British Ballet activities. In addition, tens of thousands of people have had the opportunity to enjoy the exhibition, with estimates in the region of 44,716, based on data from just 18 of the 29 libraries.

The programme has engaged a wide range of visitors, audience members, and participants, including: people of different ages (from small children to older adults); people from different ethnic communities; family, school / college and community groups, as well as individual sign-ups; and people with varying levels of ability in and knowledge about dance. While quantitative data is not of sufficient quality to understand the reach of the programme to non-library members, qualitative evidence suggests libraries have had some success in reaching people and communities who don't normally engage with their services. Public reactions to the programme, and feedback from libraries on the quality of events, has been extremely positive. Members of the public have found the events to be enjoyable, interesting, moving, and inspiring.

While taking the programme to, and adapting it for, library services operating in a wide variety of circumstances, with varying levels of capacity and expertise, has at times been challenging, the vast majority of library services (76%) report being satisfied with the programme and feeling that their evident hard work has been worthwhile.

Achievement against NLHF outcomes

There is evidence that the programme has met all of the specific outcomes agreed with NLHF:

People will have greater wellbeing

There is a clear sense of joy in responses to the participant surveys. The programme's mix of visual images, personal stories, movement, and music seems to have been particularly uplifting. Members of the public have clearly enjoyed taking part in creative activities and reconnecting with creative passions. They have also enjoyed interacting with members of the BBBP creative team and other local people, with many people feeling the programme has fostered a stronger sense of community and belonging. For many Black audience members and participants, and people of mixed heritage, the programme appears to have validated their experiences and reinforced a sense of pride in their identity. A wider group of people said they felt more confident and motivated to explore and pursue their dreams as a result of taking part in BBBP activities. All of these benefits for members of the public seem likely to contribute to improved wellbeing. In addition, the programme seems to have had some benefits in terms of staff morale and engagement, with services noting that staff appreciated the opportunity to take part in activities alongside members of the public.

People will have developed skills

The evaluation suggests that child participants have developed their skills in dancing, story-telling, writing, communications, team-working, VR, and photography as a result of taking part in programme activity. There is plenty of evidence that adult participants have learned new skills too, including in dance, choreography, and photography. In addition, the evaluation suggests that staff at half (15) of participating library services and volunteers at three services have improved their skills as a result of the programme. The vast majority of improvements in staff and volunteer skills relate to the management of projects and programmes and the marketing and hosting of cultural events. Libraries report that staff are now feeling more confident to host cultural programmes and events, even where they have little prior knowledge of the themes and issues involved.

Heritage will be identified and better explained; people will have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions

For many members of the public, the programme has offered a unique and special opportunity to experience ballet and meet professional dancers that they would not have otherwise had. It has also been an opportunity for members of the public, and library staff, to learn about an important part of our cultural history and heritage that has been largely hidden from view. Comments from survey respondents suggest that most visitors and audience members had little prior knowledge of the history of ballet, and of Black ballet in particular. Programme events appear to have been revelatory for these people, while also offering new perspectives on history and heritage for those with greater prior understanding. The programme seems to have inspired many people to continue to learn about the stories, history, and experiences of Black ballet professionals.

Evidence also suggests that the stories of talent, hardship, strength, and resilience at the heart of the BBBP have relevance far beyond the world of ballet. The programme seems to have provided an opportunity to open up some challenging but important conversations about race, class, diversity, and aspiration that are likely to resonate for some time to come. There is some evidence to suggest that the programme may have been especially impactful in areas that have historically had lower levels of diversity, and where local people may have had fewer opportunities to encounter this type of content before.

All in all, this is a real achievement for the programme partners and the library services that have taken part.

Learning for the future

In addition to its clear positive impact, the programme has generated a great deal of learning that should prove useful for the future. In their survey responses, library service leads have highlighted some of the learning they plan to take forward in their own work. The sections below set out some of the main points of learning for the programme partners.

Learning about the value of libraries as venues for cultural & heritage activity

Experiences on this programme have confirmed the value of libraries as venues for cultural and heritage activity. The programme has demonstrated that libraries can help to overcome barriers to participation by bringing cultural and heritage activities closer to communities and hosting them in a friendly and relaxed environment in which people feel comfortable to take part.

The programme has demonstrated the value of libraries collaborating with leading arts organisations to bring fresh content to local audiences. It seems to have been helpful that Oxygen Arts offered a mix of different kinds of activity so library services could use their local knowledge to adapt the programme to suit their own communities. While all programme offers proved engaging and impactful, evidence suggests that dance has been particularly well received as a novel activity that is not often found in a library setting.

The programme has also shown how hosting a successful cultural and heritage programme can help raise the profile and change the perception of libraries among members of the public and local partners. The programme has provided an opportunity for library services to forge and / or strengthen relationships with a whole host of partners, which in some cases have already yielded tangible results in the form of new collaborations.

Learning for Libraries Connected

A productive model for working with library services

Experience on the programme has demonstrated the value of this way of working, whereby Libraries Connected supports heads of service to create and secure funding for an initiative, and then manages a national programme of cultural activity on behalf of, and in collaboration with, library colleagues. Library services have appreciated the role that Libraries Connected has played in running this programme. Many services confirmed that they would not have been able to host such activity by themselves.

Choosing & working with programme partners

Partnership working on this programme was made easier because leads at Libraries Connected and Oxygen Arts already knew each other and Oxygen Arts were already familiar with how libraries work, how varied they are, and the types of challenges they tend to face. Oxygen Arts' team of dancers and facilitators were also highly skilled, had compelling stories to tell, and understood the programme's objectives. It seems likely that more time will be required at the beginning of a project to establish mutual understanding and expectations if working with a new partner in future.

While the original plan was for all activities to be held within the month allocated to each library service, in the end quite a lot of activity was rescheduled and took place over a longer period of time to ensure sufficient numbers of participants. Flexibility on the part of Oxygen Arts made this possible, and there were some advantages, not least more time to understand and tailor the programme to community needs and interests. However, this also made managing logistics more complicated and meant later months of the programme were busier than planned for Oxygen Arts. In future, this experience suggests that exploring a potential partners' willingness and capacity to be flexible in delivery should be a key focus of early conversations. Experience also suggests that more

time and budget might be needed for delivery partners to communicate with and support libraries on an on-going basis, including with outreach.

Programme set up with library services

Experience on this programme suggests that the period from Expressions of Interest to library services being invited to take part is critically important. The delivery timeframes for programmes, however, often require activity to commence as soon as possible, and before all relevant information is available and details have been worked through.

One of the most important lessons from this programme is the need to build in a more substantial set up phase in which to explain the programme to library services, clarify roles and expectations (especially around marketing requirements), and identify any skill gaps and support needs. Learning from this programme suggests it might be helpful to do the following, in particular, as part of set up: provide guidance on the number of days each library / library service might need to dedicate each month to managing the programme; clarify space and technological requirements for hosting events (including for any audio-visual / VR elements); identify key contacts for different elements of the programme; and agree protocols for sharing information (including communicating any changes of personnel within library teams). Set up should also include clarity about costs and contracts (whether libraries can charge for events that are externally funded and who bears the costs if events are cancelled), and copyright and licencing issues (see below).

Ideally, programme leaders would convene a working group comprising library services operating in different contexts and with different levels of resource and expertise to explore and advise on these matters, identifying possible pinch points and barriers to address.

On-going communications with library services

Libraries Connected invested in communications with and support of libraries, with a whole host of resources made available on their Basecamp. Additional support was also made available in response to programme learning (for example the webinar to support library services with marketing and outreach). However, learning from this programme indicates a need to repeat communications and continually direct library services to available resources. This is particularly important with long programmes where there may be a substantial time period between launch and a particular library service's allocated delivery month. Scheduling some more regular check-in meetings and Q&A sessions throughout the life of a programme might be useful and a good way of picking up any delivery issues at an early stage.

Scheduling activity

Learning from this programme suggests that engagement can decrease significantly in both August and December / January due to competing priorities, such as holidays, and weather-related factors. Where possible, it would seem sensible to avoid launching new initiatives or scheduling major events or activities during these periods. Instead, these times can be used for design and planning, light engagement, and reflection.

Outreach, marketing, & PR

Experience from this programme suggests that engaging school groups is a good way of achieving consistent levels of participation. It would therefore seem sensible to prioritise partnerships with schools when planning future engagement, and to develop offers that align as much as possible with curricula demands, extra-curricular activities, and school calendars.

Beyond school groups, experience suggests that recruiting participants can be difficult even when activities are made freely available to library services and members of the public. Some library

services have no budget for activities and therefore no mailing lists to use to advertise events. As part of a more substantial set up phase, it would be helpful to identify services that need additional support to secure sufficient numbers of participants. The costs of providing this support should be built into supplier budgets.

The programme did receive some very positive media coverage (see Appendix 4 for more details). However, partners found that despite having some excellent photos and content, this was not often picked up by the press. For future programmes, it may be worth allocating some of the budget for specialist arts PR support. Learning from this programme (and other Libraries Connected projects) suggests this resource should be used to support libraries with local comms engagement, which is more likely to be successful than activity that is led by national programme teams alone.

Involving local artists

While the programme partners were keen for libraries to commission their own activities, and so create opportunities for local creatives, there was little take up of this aspect of the programme. As part of the scoping stage of any future programme, it may be worth exploring in more detail the appetite for this type of activity and the likely barriers and enabling factors. Targetted help for those libraries that lack contacts with their local creative ecosystem might be needed. Tapping into the networks of programme funders, issuing a call out to artist collectives via Libraries Connected regional groupings, or seeking advice from ACE-funded library services (who will have more expertise in this area) might be possible ways to take this forward.

Improving evaluation

Experience on this programme suggests improvements could be made to evaluation processes in future. Libraries Connected staff found it quite time-consuming to chase library services for evaluation data. Some services found the library survey onerous, with some questions they could not answer as they did not routinely collect the relevant data (e.g. on the age and membership status of people booking / attending events). The main participant survey was also not suitable for children, until simpler versions were created. In future, it would be worth establishing an evaluation working group (perhaps a subset of the group outlined above) as part of the initial set up phase. This group (comprising a mix of library services) could work together with the programme leads (and external evaluator if relevant) to co-design the evaluation framework, identify data sources that all library services have access to / can realistically collect, and review evaluation tools. Identifying some clear lines of enquiry from the start might also be useful in bringing focus to the design of tools, as well as to data analysis.

There were clear disadvantages in collecting monitoring data as part of the library survey, in particular this meant the surveys were long, and data was not always complete if surveys were returned before rescheduled events took place. It would be preferable to separate out processes for monitoring and evaluation in future, with libraries submitting a simple monitoring spreadsheet of events and attendance figures which could be more easily cross-checked with information held by the delivery partner. For programmes such as this, with multiple similar activities (e.g. the BBB presentation, panel, and In Conversation event), steps need to be taken to ensure respondents (both library staff and members of the public) understand which event they are providing feedback on/data for, to avoid confusion. Ideally, more provision should be made for library service focus group discussions as part of programme evaluation, as these have additional benefits in terms of shared learning and community building (in line with the wider objectives of Libraries Connected). Discussions with the Project Board and other key stakeholders should also be built into the evaluation from the start, as the people involved will have important perspectives to share. An enhanced communications effort is needed to reinforce the importance of evaluation and support

good practice. Library services need to be aware of evaluation requirements at an early stage, ideally before deciding to take part.

Evaluation budgets need to be increased to accommodate these changes. A minimum of 5% of programme costs might be appropriate in future.

Handovers & management within Libraries Connected

Once Libraries Connected was successful in being awarded funding for this programme, responsibility for delivery was handed over to a team that was not involved in the bid writing. In future, it may be useful to build in some early involvement of delivery teams before bids are submitted to ensure those teams understand what needs to be delivered, and any budgeting or other assumptions that have been made, and are ready to go as soon as projects are handed over.

The bid writing team at Libraries Connected used Google Docs, as this facilitated joint working with Oxygen Arts. The project delivery team continued to use this once the project was handed over, alongside Sharepoint (to manage information of relevance to Libraries Connected only), resulting in occasional confusion about what information should sit where. In future, as part of project set up, it might be helpful to more explicitly identify the types of information that will be needed for different purposes and audiences and decide which systems to use to accommodate this.

Partners found that showcasing this programme at various Libraries Connected events was a very useful way of generating interest among library services and attracting participants. It would seem to be helpful to build such opportunities into future projects and programmes. These events are also opportunities to share learning.

Licencing

Programme partners need to carefully consider digital elements of any future application to NHLF to make sure that these can be lawfully released under a Creative Commons 4.0 licence that allows for commercial use. If they are unsure, and particularly where digital elements are not central to the project or programme, they should consider if these could be funded separately.

Learning for Oxygen Arts:

On-going programme management & communications

As outlined above, experience on this programme suggests that more time was needed for Oxygen Arts to manage activities, and communicate with and support libraries, on an on-going basis than was originally planned for. This was especially the case given the need to reschedule some of the events. In future, and where possible, it would seem sensible to build some additional time into budgets for this from the start.

Flexibility on age categories

Library services appreciated it when Oxygen Arts took a flexible and collaborative approach to age categories to help ensure the best uptake and experience for their particular communities. Continuing to take such an approach in future seems advisable.

Marketing collateral

Library services have emphasised the importance of having suitable images available as soon as possible to support marketing efforts. It has also been suggested that there may have been missed opportunities to share early images of the programme in a library setting with those libraries that were due to host the programme further down the line (the setting for the show in Bristol was said

to have been a particularly striking photo opportunity). These might be things to consider further for the future.

Managing attendance

Towards the end of the run, Oxygen Arts began sending a confirmation email to libraries the week before programmed activity to check on numbers and logistics, and this proved useful. In future, more regular check-ins with libraries should be built into the programme from the start, especially for open access events.

Evidence suggests that Oxygen Arts were responsive and flexible in the delivery of this programme. In future, it may be worth thinking in advance about cut off points for attendance at particular events where it is no longer cost-effective to travel to venues. It may also be helpful to consider the point at which it is preferable to reschedule a whole month of activity, if recruitment isn't progressing to plan and library staff don't have sufficient capacity to take mitigating action.

Accounting for wear & tear

Finally, library leads receiving the exhibition towards the end of its run reported that some of the panels were understandably showing signs of wear and tear. In future, some contingency should be built into budgets to allow for re-printing / shipping, as required.

Appendix

Appendix 1: list of respondents to the library service survey

Libraries Connected, Oxygen Arts, and the evaluator would like to thank the following people for kindly responding to the library survey, as well as collecting survey responses from members of the public and, in a few cases, speaking to the evaluator about their experiences:

| Library service | Name | Title / Role |
|--|---------------------------|--|
| Bracknell Forest Libraries | Anne Hayward | Adult & Digital Librarian |
| Bradford | Dionne Hood | Libraries Development Manager |
| Bristol Libraries | Katharine Seymour | Reader Development Librarian |
| Buckinghamshire Libraries | Emma Large | Project Support Officer, Rekindle |
| Calderdale | David Duffy | Libraries Manager |
| Camden | Claire Marriott | Community Library Manager |
| Explore Libraries & Archives (York) | Dave Fleming | Creative Producer |
| Gloucestershire Libraries | Chelsea Crutchley | Customer Development Coordinator |
| Hartlepool Borough Council | Jamie Kelly | Community Hubs Manager |
| Hull Libraries | Jessica Leathley | Culture & Health Development Manager |
| Hull Libraries | Michelle Alford | Director of Libraries, Archives & Culture |
| Inspire: Culture, Learning & Libraries (Nottinghamshire) | Helen Ackroyd | Libraries & Culture Manager |
| Lancashire | John Haigh | Bibliotherapy & Wellbeing Officer |
| Liverpool Libraries & Information Services | Denise Jones | Central Libraries & Archives Manager |
| Middlesbrough Library Service | Andrew Crowe | Community Hubs & Libraries Development Officer |
| Northamptonshire Libraries & Information Service | James Toal | Library Manager |
| Northamptonshire Libraries & Information Service | Jo Hoyer | Universal Offers Programme Co-ordinator |
| North Lincolnshire Libraries | Tim Davies / Jemima Kelly | Librarian |

| Library service | Name | Title / Role |
|--|-----------------------|--|
| North Tyneside Libraries | Rachel Warkcup | Community Hubs & Libraries Outreach & Events Manager |
| North Yorkshire | Nicola Dengate | Area Librarian East |
| Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council | Diane Lonsdale | Libraries Development Officer |
| Rotherham | Pippa Hughes | Team Leader: Libraries & Neighbourhood Hubs |
| Sheffield Libraries, Archive & Information Service | Alexis Filby | Collections & Development Officer |
| Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council | Katie Jeffs | Libraries Development Manager |
| Staffordshire | Liz Gardner | Library Development Officer |
| Stockport | Shelly Shine | Project Librarian |
| Suffolk Community Libraries | Eleanor Root | Cultural Partnerships Lead |
| Sunderland Library Services | Lizzie Nixon | Creative Programme & Partnerships Manager |
| Vision Redbridge Culture & Leisure | Viktoria Nourpeissova | Culture & Library Development Officer |
| Wakefield | Marcia Adey | Senior Library Officer |
| Walsall Council | Beth Chadd | Library Manager |

Appendix 2: activities hosted by participating library services

The table below details the types of activity hosted by each library service, and the libraries that took part in each area²⁵:

| Exhibition dates | Library service & activities | Library service & activities |
|------------------|--|---|
| October 2024 | Stockport (Stockport Central Library & Grand Central Square): Onisere story-telling; Island Movements show; in-person VR session; photography, ballet & dance workshops (some activities to March 2025) | Redbridge (Redbridge Central, Fullwell Cross, Goodmayes, Hainault & Wanstead libraries, & Ilford High St): Onisere story-telling (inc. SEND adapted version); Island Movements show; photography, ballet, dance & creative writing workshops; BBB presentation |
| November 2024 | Liverpool (Liverpool Central & Toxteth libraries): Onisere story-telling; Island Movements show; photography, dance, & creative writing workshops; BBB presentation | Camden (Pancras Square & Swiss Cottage libraries): Onisere story-telling; photography workshop (some activities in October 2024) |
| December 2024 | Bracknell (Bracknell Library): Onisere story-telling; in-person VR session; photography, ballet, dance & creative writing workshops; In Conversation (some activities to April 2025) | Calderdale (Central Library & Archives): Onisere story-telling; Island Movements show; photography, dance & creative writing workshops; In Conversation (some activities to April 2025). Plus, local activity (photography) |
| January 2025 | Gloucestershire (Bishops Cleeve, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Quedgey & Longlevens libraries): Onisere story-telling; ballet & creative writing workshops; In Conversation (some activities to March 2025) | Bradford (Manningham, Shipley, City, & Keighley libraries): Onisere story-telling; photography & ballet workshops; panel event (some activities to March 2025) |
| February 2025 | Bristol (Junction 3, Filwood, & Bristol Central libraries): Onisere story-telling; Island Movements show; ballet & creative writing workshops; BBB presentation; In Conversation | Sunderland (Washington Library): Onisere story-telling; Island Movements show; photography, dance, & creative writing workshops; BBB presentation |
| March 2025 | Solihull (Core Library): photography, ballet, & creative writing workshops | Lancashire (Fleetwood Library): creative writing workshop |
| April 2025 | Sheffield (Sheffield Central & Kiveton libraries): Onisere story-telling; In Conversation, BBB presentation (some activities to July 2025). Participation on 0.5 basis | North Tyneside (North Shields Community Hub, Killingworth, & Longbenton libraries): Onisere story-telling; Island Movements show; photography, ballet, & dance workshops |

²⁵ Some activities were run more than once in each location, in some cases being adapted for individuals of different ages or for family, school, or college groups. The table does not include events or libraries where activity was scheduled but did not in the end take place.

| | | | |
|----------------|--|---|---|
| May 2025 | Rotherham (Riverside & Wath libraries): Onisere story-telling; ballet/dance, & creative writing workshops; In Conversation, BBB presentation (some activities to July 2025). Participation on 0.5 basis | York (Explore Libraries & Archives & Tang Hall Library): Onisere story-telling; Island Movements show; dance, ballet, photography, & creative writing workshops; online VR session | |
| June 2025 | Middlesbrough (My Place, Acklam, & North Ormesby community hubs, Newport Community Centre, & Middlesbrough Central Library): Onisere story-telling; photography & ballet workshops (some activities to December 2025, when exhibition returned) | Northamptonshire (Central Northampton & Wellingborough libraries): Onisere story-telling; Island Movements show; creative writing workshops; BBB presentation; In Conversation | Walsall (Lichfield Street Hub): Onisere story-telling; creative writing workshop |
| July 2025 | Staffordshire (Burton Library): Onisere story-telling; dance workshop | Hartlepool (South, Central, & Seaton Carew community hubs, & Throston Grange Library): Onisere story-telling; photography, ballet, dance, & creating writing workshops (some activities to November 2025) | |
| August 2025 | Redcar & Cleveland (Loftus & Redcar libraries): Onisere story-telling; photography, dance, & creative writing workshops (some activities to October 2025) | Wakefield (Stanley Library): dance workshop & lecture/Q&A (some activities to November 2025) | |
| September 2025 | Hull (Western & Children's libraries): photography, dance, & ballet workshops (activities in August 2025). Participation on 0.5 basis | Inspire Nottinghamshire (Worksop, Beeston, Mansfield, Newark, Retford, West Bridgford, & The Old libraries): photography, dance, & creative writing workshops; BBB presentation, panel. Plus, local activity (poetry) | |
| October 2025 | North Lincolnshire (Scunthorpe Central & Barton Upon Humber libraries, Brigg & Asby community hubs, Epworth Library & Community Hub): Onisere story-telling; photography, ballet, dance, & creative writing workshops. Participation on 0.5 basis | Suffolk (Ipswich County, Gainsborough Community, Lowestoft, Beccles, & Bury St Edmunds libraries): Island Movements; Onisere story-telling; photography & dance workshops | |
| November 2025 | Buckinghamshire (Burnham, Aylesbury, Buckingham, Chesham, & High Wycombe libraries): Onisere story-telling; photography workshop (activities took place in October 2025) | North Yorkshire (Scarborough, Pickering, Filey, Whitby, Stokesley Community, Richmond Community, Northallerton, Thirsk Community, Skipton, & Ripon libraries): Island Movements show; Onisere story-telling; creative writing workshop | |

Appendix 3: Black British Ballet Event Options

The events offered to library services are listed below, together with prices (excluding travel but including VAT):

1. Dance workshop (60m), lecture and Q&A (90m) - £520

Dance workshop led by one of the dancers from the project, that could include ballet mixed with contemporary, African or Caribbean dance. The lecture will be by Dr Sandie Bourne and will include a Q&A with the dancer and Dr Bourne.

2. Classical ballet workshop (60-90m, all ages) - £200

Led by one of the dancers from the project, this ballet workshop can be tailored to all levels, beginners, intermediate and professionals, and all ages from 7+, and can be followed by an informal Q&A with the dancer/instructor.

3. *Onisere and the Ballet Queen* book session for 4-8 year olds (45-60m) - £175

Onisere wants to be a ballet dancer but there's just one problem: she's black and she's never seen any other ballet dancers who look like her. Enter, the ballet queen, Simbira, who takes Onisere, and her annoying, football mad little brother Tayo, on a fantastical journey through the history of black British ballet. A fun filled session of dance and storytelling to find out more about the black dancers who blazed a trail through British ballet!

4. Panel event (90-120m) - £1000

Featuring three of the dancers from the Black British Ballet project being interviewed about their rich and varied careers inside and outside of ballet.

5. In conversation (60-90m) - £400

Featuring one of the dancers from the Black British Ballet project being interviewed by Dr Bourne or Marsha Lowe on their careers and experiences in ballet.

6. Black British Ballet presentation by Dr Bourne (60-90m) - £200

A talk through the rich history of Black dancers in British ballet from the 40s to the present day. This talk can be tailored for schools and adult audiences and is followed by a Q&A session.

7. *Island Movements* ballet (30m show + 45m Q&A, Oct/Nov 2024 only) - £2300

Island Movements is a short ballet that tells the story of Windrush and explores the impact of this generation's experiences on their families, communities and society. Beginning with a young Caribbean soldier in WW2 Britain, this moving tale follows him and his family through their life in the UK up to the current day. The show will be followed by a Q&A with the dancers and creators.

8. Dance photography workshop 14 years to adult (60-90m) - £450

A hands-on group session for budding photographers to learn more about movement and dance photography. Cameras are provided or participants can bring their own. The course leader will be joined by a professional dancer as a model.

9. Creative writing workshop for 9-16 year olds (90m) - £200

Taking some of the experiences of ballet dancers from the exhibition as its theme, this workshop will take students through a series of group and individual activities with a view to producing a final written response to the exhibition.

10. Creating a VR experience (60m) - online £250, in person £400

The engaging talk will explain to the audience the steps taken to make the Black British Ballet virtual reality experience. BOM (Birmingham Open Media) is the UK's leading immersive arts organisation, empowering communities through innovation with immersive technology and inclusive learning programmes.

Appendix 4: Media coverage for the programme

Some of the positive media coverage achieved by the programme is listed below:

14th October 2024: Liverpool Welcomes Ground-breaking Black British Ballet Exhibition.
<https://liverpoolexpress.co.uk/liverpool-welcomes-ground-breaking-black-british-ballet-exhibition/>.

11th April 2025: BBC Radio Sheffield - Sile Sibanda Show Interview with Marsha Lowe and Darren Panton. NLHF acknowledged as funders. Sile also came to the In Conversation event with Darren Panton at Sheffield Library on 16th April.

21st May 2025: Into The Light exhibition at York Explore library highlights Britain's black ballet pioneers. <https://charleshutchpress.co.uk/tag/black-british-ballet/>.

28th & 29th May 2025: BBC Radio York - Daytime Show Interview with Marsha Lowe and Dave Fleming from York Explore (on the 28th) and with Ben Love who had just delivered a workshop at York Explore (on the 29th). NLHF acknowledged as funders.

4th November 2025: Exhibition-puts-ballets-black-trailblazers-in-the-spotlight.
<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/news/2025/exhibition-puts-ballets-black-trailblazers-spotlight>.

5th Nov 2025: Scarborough Library hosts Into the Light ballet exhibition
<https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/25595840.scarborough-library-hosts-light-ballet-exhibition/>.