



# Wildfire Rising

Creating Spaces for Ethnically Diverse Dance and Movement Artists



October 2022 - September 2023

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**not an end in itself.**

**We welcome the conversation with you.**



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**Gnagniko, R. (2023). *Wildfire Rising Programme Year 2, Evaluation Report. Amiokaa Ltd.***

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Adhering to these guidelines contributes to an ethical and vibrant intellectual community.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

The Wildfire Rising Programme provides a space for ethnically diverse dance and movement artists to develop their artistry as part of a supported cohort. Movema and Cheshire Dance created this programme in 2021 to put their expertise and values at the service of the global momentum to address the underrepresentation of ethnically diverse artists in the sector.

*“The programme recruited three North West based dance artists, who each took part in paid, bespoke professional development and reflection and received a £1.5k commission with support to develop their dance work. The artists come from different backgrounds, cultures, educational settings, and they have different kinds of family responsibilities. Their career path to dance was not straightforward, and they all had to overcome unique challenges. Along the way, they developed specific skills, knowledge and abilities that form strong narratives of their resilience.”*

**Evaluation Summary Report April 2022**

We evaluated the outcomes of the programme's first iteration and provided recommendations regarding artists' experiences. The recommendation invited the programme to reflect on how implementing participants' feedback and learnings could improve future artists participants' experience at the service of creativity and a dynamic Dance sector.

For this second iteration, incorporating a series of programmes and events between October 2022 and September 2023, there was an ambition to embed learning from year 1.

*“This year the organisations will focus on deepening our impact by creating time and space for mental well-being, investing into artist development, and creating platforms and events to host and promote the talent and skills in the North West.”*

**Wildfire Rising Year 2**

Besides, the outcomes pursued by the evaluation process have been largely embodied by the programme itself at each step of the journey and led internally. Our ongoing input facilitated continuous reflective practice and supervision that contributed to meeting initially set goals despite challenges encountered along the way.

## 1.2. Programme Goals

### *“Project Goals*

*Wildfire Rising year 2 will build on the success & learning from year 1 to deliver a 12 month programme which:*

- *Supports 5 associate artists to continue developing their practice & leadership with development budget & bespoke support*
- *Develops networks & opportunities for ethnically diverse dance artists in the NW (Artist days, masterclasses & 1:1 surgeries)*
- *Shares, celebrates & raises the profile of ethnically diverse dance artists in the NW (through 3 Inquiring Bodies events & Spread Your Wings conversation)*
- *Develops staff through Monthly EDI conversations & coaching/mentoring budget*
- *Develops Movema and partner organisation Cheshire Dance (CD) (through learning exchange focused on barriers to participation, needs & representation of ethnically diverse dance artists)”*

### **Arts Council England Funding Application**

For this second iteration, we focused our evaluation on the programme ambitions in relation to:

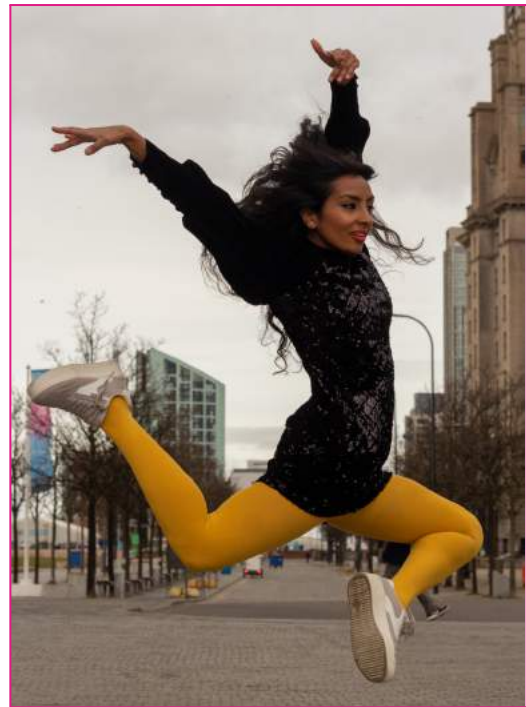
- **Artist Development and Support:** To engage more ethnically diverse artists in support and development activities.
- **Platforming and raising the profile of Ethnically Diverse Artists:** To create a platform for ethnically diverse artists and raise their profile.
- **Creative Skills:** To offer courses and training on key areas of development.
- **Supporting research into the dance sector:** To understand better the challenges and opportunities ethnically diverse artists face.
- **Leadership Development:** To provide mentorship and training for emerging ethnically diverse leaders in the dance sector.

## 1.3. Participants' Journey

During the induction phase, participants were given opportunities to reflect upon and analyse their practice, focusing on their communication style and how their unique experiences could enrich and flourish within the programme.

Throughout the programme, participants had access to coaching, guidance, and mentoring, enabling them to select the type of support that aligned best with their aspirations. This allowed participants the freedom to determine their developmental path and the form that their performances and collective activities would assume.

As an integral aspect of the programme, participants were allowed to assume full control over their personal and professional development, with numerous chances to attain concrete outcomes from this development. Each participant had the chance to lead public sessions alongside other practitioners, transitioning from the analysis and planning of their development to the practical realisation of their artistic vision.



All participants incorporated diverse cultural elements into their practice and the programme itself. This cultural diversity greatly enriched the experiences of both participants and visiting artists. Moreover, in addition to addressing ethnic diversity, there was a strong emphasis on understanding how economic and social backgrounds, learning abilities, physical capabilities, and other circumstances impact one's experience. This was achieved through surveys, bursaries, training, and ongoing conversations centred around equality, diversity, and inclusion. This approach created an environment where individuals felt empowered to customise their experience while engaging in group learning activities.



Through feedback and experiential learning, participants were able to articulate their artistic vision, share it, and acquire invaluable learning experiences that can significantly contribute to their future as Dance and Movement practitioners and leaders in the sector.

Participants were given the authority to steer their journey and influence the content of assessments and recommendations for future iterations. Based on this feedback, the programme aims further to enhance artists' sense of empowerment and leadership, enabling future participants to take the lead in expanding the programme's impact even more widely.

## 1.4. Creating Spaces for Diverse Artists

Movema and Cheshire Dance invested particular care and resources to ensure that all programme participants were welcomed in an environment that provided physical safety and nurtured psychological well-being. This commitment aligned with the values of inclusivity upheld by both organisations, and within this programme, it proved instrumental in affording creativity the room to experiment, flourish, and take root.

Venues were selected with great deliberation to ensure physical safety and establish connections with communities and spaces where participants could engage with other external practitioners in the region.



Considerable attention was dedicated to cultivating a welcoming atmosphere through ongoing reflections on enhancing the monitoring process, video capture, and accommodations for diverse abilities and communication preferences.

The project embodied collaborative values by fostering partnerships between organisations and guest participants in dance and movement practices. Each event and gathering adhered to these principles, with meticulous planning, delivery, and review, resulting in remarkable progress between each activity. Accessibility, inclusivity, support and learning opportunities all showed notable improvement, as evidenced by feedback forms completed by participants and assessed by the team after each event.

The lessons gleaned from the programme will benefit future iterations of the programme, as well as inform broader organisational planning. Additionally, they can serve as a valuable resource for key sector actors, including Dance Consortia North West organisations and the wider dance sector. The learning aims to be widely shared nationally and internationally through various networks, events, and conferences, such as Dance Consortia North West,

## Evaluation Wildfire Rising Programme, December 2023

Dance in the North, One Dance UK, DCNW, International Association of Blacks in Dance, Chinese Arts Now, Kalasangam, Bristol Diverse Arts Network, Serendipity – Let's Dance International Frontiers among others.



## 2. The Programme

### 2.1. Implementing Learning from Year 1

It was in 2021 that the Wildfire Rising programme started offering Dance and Movement artists paid, bespoke professional development along with a commission and support to develop their dance work. The programme aimed to remove barriers of inequalities and provided a platform for culturally diverse artists to share their journey and current challenges within the industry.



- The programme offered **support in professional and artistic development**, dance practice and knowledge, employability and self-development, networking, public speaking, and further support after the programme ended.
- The Spread Your Wings public event offered an open and structured environment for dance artists from the global majority to **share and discuss barriers and challenges** within the dance sector.
- The programme contained evaluation activities to **gain knowledge of minoritised artists' needs** in the sector and recommended providing additional resources for further feedback activity, support for inclusive professionals, and regular anti-racism training.

The programme's success also emphasised the importance of inclusive practices in nurturing the global momentum of inclusion, and the evaluation invited the project team to reflect on their learning and how they may cascade it in the Wildfire Rising programme's continuous improvement process. This first iteration of the programme made clear the need for

1. Offering more opportunities to exchange knowledge and skills and to collaborate in showcasing skills, creative practice, and creative inspiration inside and outside the programme.
2. Understanding who the individuals are and how their intersections meet
3. Valuing collaborative projects between participants.

4. Creating more projects and networking opportunities where participants can showcase their work and make professional connections.
5. Discussing socio-economic background, learning and communication styles and preferences with participants from the start.
6. Allowing more flexibility in participants' use of their budget so it reflects their particular needs.
7. Giving more opportunities for planning activities at the beginning of the programme
8. Letting go of the assumption that all participants will need a coach/mentor to achieve their particular development goals.
9. Taking more time to acknowledge the diversity of needs by creating a more structured initial needs assessment phase and being flexible enough to respond to the particular needs of each individual.
10. Being paid for their development time so that they can invest in their own development
11. Flexibility in how they use development and financial support to ensure it truly supports their artistic practice and development.
12. Bespoke, regular support for realising projects and closing skills gaps.
13. Connecting with other artists, organisations and mentors within the dance sector.
14. Caring for artists holistically, acknowledging their circumstances, barriers they face and racial and other trauma they may have experienced.

## 2.2. Continuously Improving

The Wildfire Rising Year 2 programme included an Independent Evaluation that involved an introduction to participants, individual interviews and observations that contributed to ongoing trauma-informed support for continuous programme improvement and a final report at the end of the programme.



Evaluation was a key component, adopting a 'reflect, review, action' approach to document and learn from the project's processes, ensuring adaptability to the needs of diverse dance artists.

As a result, some evaluation and recommendations elements were shared and discussed during the program.

The evaluation was continuous and internally led with our support. The evaluation was conducted throughout the WFR Year 2 Consolidation Programme, with data collection occurring at

various points throughout the year. The recommendations were shared with stakeholders during the programme.

Amiokaa's ongoing continuous improvement process comprised supporting the team in:

- Analysing, planning, implementing and reviewing processes and surveys.
- Conducting qualitative interviews of participants.
- Monitoring public-facing programme events to assess engagement and participation.
- Facilitating evaluative activities.

## 2.3. Providing a Supportive Structure for Ethnically Diverse Artists

The Wildfire Rising Year 2 project served a network of diverse artists in the North West, including Movema Artists staff. Public events focused on celebrating and increasing the visibility of diverse artists, fostering new collaborations, and addressing access and programming gaps in key venues. The wellbeing of staff members and artists was prioritised, emphasising inclusivity and care in their work.

WFR Y2 Strands	Activity Plan
1. Artist Development and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 12-month bespoke development support to 5 associate artists</li> <li>■ 1:1 artist surgery sessions with co-directors from Movema and Cheshire Dance</li> <li>■ a £1k development budget for each artist</li> <li>■ paid bursary places to attend 2 x Artist Development Days, 2 x Inquiring Bodies days, and 2 x Movema open EDI conversations</li> <li>■ guest artist fees and support to curate and lead one Inquiring Bodies event each</li> <li>■ support to match fund and deliver WFR Year 1 commissions</li> <li>■ Artist Development Days, Masterclasses, and 1:1 Artist Surgeries for ethnically diverse dance artists</li> </ul>
2. Inquiring Bodies Series	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ three Inquiring Bodies events to celebrate and raise the profile of ethnically diverse artists</li> <li>■ practical sessions with Guest Artists, and a session for host organisations to share info about their organisation</li> <li>■ paid bursary places for ethnically diverse artists to attend each event</li> <li>■ Guest Artists and support by Movema and Cheshire Dance</li> </ul>
3. Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ a follow-up evaluation by Amiokaa to ascertain the impact of WFR Year 1, 6 months later</li> <li>■ a visual artist to create Visual Minutes of the three Inquiring Bodies events</li> <li>■ a videographer to capture the key elements and impact of the programme and create an engaging film for advocacy and sharing learning</li> <li>■ a written Evaluation Report by Movema which will include both quantitative and qualitative data</li> </ul>
4. Staff Wellbeing and Team Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 12 x EDI conversations with the Movema team, and offer of 5 paid bursaries for ethnically diverse artists to attend</li> <li>■ support to staff and artists who have experienced discrimination and trauma through coaching sessions with expert coaches</li> <li>■ a reflexive practice between Movema and Cheshire Dance, and hold a Board Learning exchange between members of both organisations</li> <li>■ A series of Anthony Walker Foundation Anti-racism Training session</li> </ul>
5. Movema and Cheshire Dance & Wider Sector Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ the development of Movema Co-Director and ethnically diverse artist Ithalia Forel</li> <li>■ leadership skills and approach through a learning exchange focused on barriers to participation, needs &amp; representation of ethnically diverse dance artists</li> <li>■ a Spread Your Wings Conversation to provide a platform for global majority dance artists to share and discuss barriers and challenges they've experienced within the dance sector</li> </ul>

### 3. Outcomes

#### 3.1. Positive Impact

Through the artists’ development, the project delivered several positive outcomes, reflecting its significant impact on various aspects, from sector practices to individual artist engagement. These outcomes illustrate the project’s comprehensive and multi-dimensional impact, ranging from enhancing sector-wide practices to fostering individual artist growth and facilitating meaningful conversations and collaborations among organisations.



Impact	Detail
<b>Increased Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A notable change in scale was observed, from engaging 14 artists in the first year to 35 in the second. This remarkable expansion demonstrates the project's growing reach and effectiveness.</li> </ul>
<b>Sector Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A key outcome was the creation of more inclusive spaces and events. The project's focus on diversity and inclusivity significantly contributed to reshaping the norms and practices within the sector. It sets a precedent for how events and spaces can be more welcoming and accommodating to a diverse range of participants.</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reflective practice was embraced, fostering internal and external constructive feedback and support.</li> <li>■ Conversations between organisations were facilitated, encouraging collaboration and shared learning across different entities.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The project positively impacted organisational staff, providing them with new skills, experiences, and perspectives. This, in turn, enhanced their professional development and capacity to contribute to their respective organisations.</li> <li>■ Organisations were able to align more closely with their strategic objectives, particularly those related to diversity, inclusivity, and community engagement. The project provided a practical framework for organisations to implement and embody these objectives in their operations and initiatives.</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Facilitators received ongoing support and opportunities for continuous learning, enhancing their skills and effectiveness in their roles.</li> <li>■ The project incorporated training, focusing on Antiracism, Biases and Trauma Informed Practice which fostered deeper understanding and engagement on these critical topics.</li> </ul>
<b>Recognition and Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The project highlighted the importance of celebrating achievements and milestones for morale and recognition of progress.</li> <li>■ Supervision played a key role in providing support and guidance, supporting the ambitions related to the quality and effectiveness of the programme.</li> </ul>
<b>Artists</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The project provided an invaluable platform for emerging artists to develop, showcase their talents, and integrate into the sector.</li> <li>■ Mid/Later stage Artists: Established artists found new opportunities for growth and engagement, benefitting from the project's innovative approaches.</li> <li>■ The project also positively impacted the staff artists, offering them professional development and expanded roles within the project.</li> </ul>

### 3.2. Further Development

These observations suggest areas where the programme can further evolve and improve, considering the diverse needs and expectations of its participants and stakeholders. Some key aspects are yet to be implemented in future programme iterations:

Theme	Detail
<b>Spread Your Wings Event</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The 'Spread Your Wings' event, while a promising concept, faced challenges in its execution. It was deemed too early and insufficiently resourced, suggesting that more planning and resources are necessary for such events to reach their full potential.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborative Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The programme revealed a need for more collaborative projects. Participants required more encouragement, facilitated spaces, and resources to engage in collaborative endeavours. Providing dedicated time and space for such collaborations could enhance the programme's impact.</li> </ul>
<b>Flexibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ While the programme was designed to be flexible, it seems there might have been too much flexibility at times. Finding the right balance in program structure is crucial to accommodate diverse needs without causing disarray.</li> </ul>
<b>Coaching Role</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Coaching in the project was sometimes perceived as unclear and possibly misunderstood. This ambiguity highlights the importance of clear communication regarding roles and responsibilities within the project.</li> </ul>
<b>Funding and Project Roles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The decision to redirect funding towards support roles was made for specific reasons. However, there was a need for more clarity around funded roles, ensuring understanding among all stakeholders.</li> </ul>

## 4. Recommendations

The final recommendations for the project highlight areas for improvement and focus, ensuring the continued growth and effectiveness of the programme:

Domain	Detail
<b>Coordination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Risk Assessments:</b> consider conducting thorough risk assessments ahead of the project to anticipate a shortage of resources (skills, people, time, venues, etc.).</li> <li>■ <b>Timing of 'Spread Your Wings' Event:</b> consider reviewing and optimising the timing for this event to maximise its impact and relevance.</li> </ul>
<b>Celebrations and Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Mid-Point Reflection:</b> consider introducing a mid-point celebration and reflection, similar to what is done at the end, to acknowledge progress and adjust goals as needed.</li> <li>■ <b>Emphasising Self-Awareness:</b> participants to reflect on self-awareness and each participant's journey, acknowledging the stretches and growth experienced.</li> </ul>
<b>Increased Participant Agency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Empowering Artists:</b> consider reinforcing the message that artists can self-organise, especially after participating in training that builds shared values. Encourage the setting of shared, flexible rules.</li> </ul>
<b>Development Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Enhanced Accountability:</b> consider how coaching activities could align more closely with the initial goals stated by the artists participants. Encourage coaches to inquire about artists' development plans to ensure alignment and progress.</li> <li>■ <b>Development Themes:</b> Specific themes for development could be identified and consistently addressed during coaching sessions, such as self-awareness, receiving and giving feedback, and having difficult conversations.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <b>Further Addressing Emotional Labour:</b> Recognise and support the emotional labour involved, considering external supervision and mentoring where useful.</li></ul>
<b>Organisational Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ <b>Producer Role Among Participants:</b> Encourage artists participants to take on producer roles, fostering leadership and organisational skills.</li><li>■ <b>Leading Events and Organisations:</b> Provide opportunities and training for artists participants to lead events and contribute to organisational leadership.</li></ul>