

Blog for RE:ignite TADT- written by Grace Turner

'RE:ignite' for #LoveDanceScotland has been a wonderful opportunity to get back into the studio and find some creativity while making new connections with Hannah Uttley and reconnecting with my sister and creative peer Ellen Turner. This was the first stage of research and development to explore the possibility of a larger scale community project with survivors of domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

Stage 1- November- December 2021 –

Here and There

This stage is best summed up in one word... research! I spent a lot of time doing research and conducting courses to broaden my knowledge of Violence Against Women and Girls. Hannah and I spent a few afternoons and days in the studio at Dance Base, these sessions involved physical training and, also, creative exploration based on stimulus from my research. It was a very strange but oddly productive system to have Ellen join us via Zoom for an hour in these sessions to offer us feedback and challenge the work we'd created. A real highlight of this time came in December when Hannah and I created aerial movement in response to a poem that a survivor had sent to us. These pieces began to expand our work from being research based to being more creative and connected with survivor experience.



Another key point from Stage 1 was our Zoom workshop. We had 6 attendees and we delivered a dance workshop exploring improvised movement, learning a sequence based on the poem 'Hope, is the think with feathers' by Emily Dickinson. We finished this session with guided discussion on topics of identity and strength. A bit of feedback was that we would have liked more time for open conversation. I think we were too ambitious and tried to squeeze too much in. Also having 3 facilitators although harnessing all of our skills did make the delivery tricky. The final aspect of stage 1 was a training workshop from Forth

Valley Rape Crisis. This gave us a good overview of theory (including terms like 'window of tolerance' and trauma responses) and began to show how we should plan and deliver a session with survivors.

Stage 2- January 2022 – Residency

The exciting stage!!! A five-and-a-half-day residency at Dance Base with Ellen, Hannah and myself actually in the studio. We began the week on Sunday with pizza and planning at my house. This was the best way to start as it got us all on the same page without eating into our time in the studio. I think it's always great to start informally without the pressure of creating from the get go!

Monday was a day of two halves- In the morning we began with a group warm up and then each spent time developing solo material based on the poem from a survivor that Hannah and I began before Christmas. Hannah on hoop exploring breath and swinging, Ellen on the ground exploring the emotional presence of the abuser and me on silks exploring echoes of memory. The afternoon was spent reading through survivor accounts; in December we created an anonymous google form which allowed survivors to answer questions and submit their experiences. From this we saw some clear similarities across the responses; a lack of confidence in themselves and that nature, particularly mountain climbing is helpful in empowering them.



Tuesday- This was my writers block day. We spent the morning exploring Trauma Responses. While one person read an analytical description of trauma responses the rest of us improvised or created movement to go alongside. Although there was potential within this idea we eventually decided that other tasks we did generated material that was more connected to the survivor experiences.

Tuesday afternoon was a different story - WORKSHOP IN EDINBURGH – This was an incredible experience with 6 attendees we taught some dance and aerial hammock then Hannah facilitated some guided discussion about their experiences and particularly their views of themselves, their strength and recovery process. This experience cemented our desire for this project to be community led and involve teaching and facilitating survivors to learn new skills and tell their stories.

Wednesday – “The Mountain Looms Above” on hump day we decided not to go to Edinburgh and instead we climbed a mountain! Given the responses from the forms about being in nature as an empowering activity we set off to scale a ‘mountain’ (one of the Ochils behind my house) and as we went Ellen and I conducted movement improvisation, creation captured by Ellen on film and Hannah created a piece of text. This experience involved a mixture of inspiration from the forms and, also from the physicality of the climb. Another great learning curve... have something different planned for hump day to recharge the inspiration and give your brain a bit of space to process the studio work.



Wednesday afternoon was again a different story – WORKSHOP IN DUNBLANE – So with a bit of a bumpy start (not being let into the building on time) we were slightly disappointed to only have two attendees... however flipping a negative into a positive these two attendees were support workers from two local charities. Therefore, the focus of this workshop became more about getting the attendees advice on how we might engage their service users. We got some wonderful advice which I don't think we'd have got if we had more participants, really valuable to gain the opinions of support workers and since we've heard from both attendees about how to assist further in the project.

Thursday a very productive and creative day. We spent the whole day in the aerial studio; beginning the day with Hannah exploring the trauma responses through movement on the Hoop and a duet of

contact improvisation between myself and Ellen exploring a phrase about leaves falling. This was incredible, to be back connecting with another person physically, moving together and finding flow in tune with a partner.

Neither Ellen or I have had that experience since pre-pandemic and it was very exciting and emotional. The afternoon was spent with Hannah and myself exploring text and

movement while Ellen did some video editing from the previous days walk. Firstly, I created movement inspired by the text Hannah created on the mountain climb. Then we explored how my silks solo from Monday (inspired by the poem) would fit alongside text from the survivor forms. This proved to be a much better fit as it connected with the emotion of lived experience within the recovery process.



Friday the last day and our WORK-IN-PROGRESS SHARING. Most of the morning was spent preparing for the sharing, cleaning and polishing the material and establishing an order. We did the sharing via Zoom with 8 people joining us virtually and 2 people (Jo and Kirsty from Dance Base) in person in the studio. We presented the following: 1- Response to the Poem by Hannah on Hoop and Ellen on the ground. 2- Form Responses with Grace on Silks and Hannah speaking. 3 - Trauma response by Hannah on Hoop. 4 - Leaf duet by Grace and Ellen with Grace ascending to the silks. 5 - Mountain text and poem with all three of us. The sharing went really well with some great feedback with audience members commenting on the parts which particularly spoke to them and offering advice on what we could do next. A key favourite was the combination of text and aerial highlighting the poignancy of the movement. Following a long discussion with Jo and Kirsty from Dance Base in which we discussed the potential avenues for the next stages we had an afternoon of evaluation where we discussed what we should do next and the avenues we could follow.

Overall - I am feeling exhausted from our project but also hugely excited to begin the next stages and see where this could lead us. I've learnt a lot across the project regarding my expectations of myself, the best process in facilitating a project and overcoming barriers both logistical and emotional.

Watch the film 'I am here' showing some of our creative output from the residency:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDOB4cFU4rc>