

# Dance family matters

Dance therapist Heather Hill describes them as 'magic moments'. They might equally be described as 'breakthroughs'; moments where children who have, for extended periods, been unresponsive to activities, suddenly come alive to them.

'A child who doesn't have eye contact: you'll have a few minutes of eye contact,' says Heather. 'A child who doesn't come into the circle, suddenly one week will be there the whole time. The magic moment for us is where you see total involvement.'

These moments come as part of Dance Family, the weekly dance therapy group Heather runs in Bayswater for children with experience of disabilities, and their families. It is built around the idea of 'people being joined together by dance'.

'It's not dance teaching,' Heather explains. 'It's working with people with expression and communication through dance, looking at dance as a human activity that people do to express themselves, to join with others socially, and communicate with others.'

Rather than formal choreography, the focus is 'bringing out the creativity in people, to find their own movement. We have the parents, the children with disabilities (a wide range of ages), and sometimes their siblings. It's a huge, diverse group.'

The classes commence with a warm-up that involves getting people to begin to move and giving them a chance to meet and greet. 'Some of the children have difficulty connecting with other people, so it's trying to get everyone to



Spreading their wings - Claire, Thomas and William explore creative ways to move at Dance Family.

feel comfortable.'

The sessions vary but usually will explore one or several different aspects of dance, from creative movement and stretching to music, drama and use of props. 'This term we're exploring rhythm and will build up to a drumming session.'

'What's really important for many of the kids is to be situated in their body and be able to use their body in a creative way to interact with others. The aim is to do things the adults and

the children can work on together, a bit like creative problem solving and play. It's all about relationship and inclusion.'

Importantly, Heather notes, 'we're not working with disability, we're working with what people can do. Some person might not be able to do certain things, but there are other things that they can do. It's about acceptance, and creating a safe environment.'

In the long term there is the possibility of public performance. For now it's a matter of parents and children having

fun and benefiting from the chance to interact creatively and socially. And, of course, appreciating those magic moments as they occur.

'I find it more exciting than going to see the Australian ballet,' says Heather. 'When you see all the parents and the kids totally involved, not just doing the steps but doing their movements with feeling and involvement, it's really lovely to see.'

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