

Published Study Shows Dance Helps Veterans with PTSD

by Deborah Denenfeld



Dancing Well: The Soldier Project is thrilled to announce that our scientific study has been published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Veterans Studies*. Results show the program of traditional dance, live music, and community significantly improved the wellness of veterans with PTSD. Family members and loved ones also showed improvement in wellness. The wellness score was a composite of multiple psychological surveys, specifically, showing improvements in feelings of connectedness, feelings of optimism, and a reduction in isolation. This is important because people with PTSD tend to isolate, which often leads to increased depression, substance abuse, and suicide. To our knowledge, Dancing Well is the only program in the world utilizing traditional dance and community to help veterans and their loved ones affected by PTSD.

For Dancing Well, publication of the study means:

- **Future researchers will know the value of community dance for people affected by PTSD**
- **Increased credibility for the Dancing Well program**
- **Improved access to sponsors for a potentially sustainable future**

The study was conducted by Dancing Well: The Soldier Project's Deborah Denenfeld, Western Connecticut State University's Robin Gustafson, Tyla Johnson, Carlos Jimenez, Marlon Tristao, and University of Louisville's Cynthia Corbitt, Michael Dylan Collins, Tasneem Karim, and Mine Obrik-Uloho.

Dancing Well dances are intentionally kept small and always include volunteer dancers, who were not included in the study. Due to the limited population, the study is considered a pilot. We hope that a larger study may be conducted in the future. The journal article may be found at <https://journal-veterans-studies.org/articles/abstract/68/>

The Dances

At this time, all Dancing Well dances are held in Louisville, Kentucky and include people from Kentucky and southern Indiana. Ninety-minute-long programs are held in series of ten sessions. Over the series, bonds form and a feeling of community develops. Smiles, friendly touch, eye contact, and frequent hugs help participants feel welcomed. Recently, one veteran who

is new to our program this year, said, *“Dancing Well gives me a reason to get out of bed. I’m actually believing in people again. I think everyone should go to Dancing Well. There would be less violence if they did.”* Dancing Well serves veterans with PTSD and/or brain injury, along with their families and loved ones, who are indirectly affected.

The program consists of traditional community and family dances, modified for the lowest-functioning person on the floor. The music is always live and is usually provided by the same musicians at each event. Special adjustments are made to the venue, such as special lighting and attention to the sound system, and long refreshment breaks encourage socializing. Many veterans and loved ones return series after series and consider Dancing Well family.

How You Can Get Involved

There is room in the Dancing Well family for all of you and you are invited to join in this important work! Dancing Well: The Soldier Project depends on donations, most of which come from individuals. All donations are tax-deductible to the extent of the law. Another way to help is by sharing information with friends and family. Volunteer help is also always needed. Many tasks can be accomplished from a distance. Contact Deborah for simple, detailed instructions.

Dancing Well Leadership Training

Would you like to learn how to encourage our veterans through dance? Thinking of offering dancing to this special group in your home community? Dancing with individuals affected by PTSD and brain injury requires sensitivity and specialized training. Based on over six years of hands-on experience leading dance with this population, Dancing Well Leadership Training will offer practical skills and advice to help dance leaders and recreation therapists develop and implement a dance program for afflicted veterans in their communities.

Two online modules will focus on PTSD, brain injuries, military culture, and the business aspects of running a nonprofit similar to Dancing Well. Experts in each area, including veterans and loved ones affected by PTSD, brain injury, or both, are helping

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to develop this training. Each module will include testing to support learning and real-time group chats for questions and discussion among participants.

A third module will be held face-to-face with participants traveling to Louisville for training and participation in the local dance series for veterans and loved ones under the supervision of Dancing Well Director Deborah Denenfeld. This module will focus on a selection of appropriate dances, programming an evening of dance, skills for interaction with this specialized population, modification of dances in real time to meet participant needs, and program evaluation. In the third module, attendees will meet some of the incredible veterans, loved ones, and volunteers, many of whom have danced with Dancing Well for years, and who have much wisdom to share. Experts will also be present and available to answer questions and help potential leaders expand



Planning a visit to Louisville? Contact Deborah to see if we will be dancing during your visit. No words can convey the joy and love expressed at the dances, and you can be a part of it. All photos courtesy of Dancing Well: The Soldier Project

their learning as they prepare to lead dancing in home communities.

Dancing Well: The Soldier Project is now in its sixth year of holding dances. Country Dance and Song Society provided bookkeeping and tax services to the organization until last year, when Dancing Well became an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Dancing Well greatly appreciates the support of CDSS, and the many dancers and dance communities who have helped to make the program possible. Over that time, many people have been helped and at least one life, of which we are aware, has been saved from suicide.

For further information on the study, Dancing Well, or the leadership training, contact Deborah Denenfeld at Deborah@DancingWell.org or through the website www.DancingWell.org.

Dancing Well thanks community partners Jacob and Nancy Bloom and The Kentucky Arts Council, the state arts agency, who supports Dancing Well: The Soldier Project with state tax dollars and federal funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.



DANCING WELL
The Soldier Project



Remembering **ARTHUR MUNISTERI**

The world of song, music, and dance lost

a joyous, talented, generous, endlessly enthusiastic, funny,

wickedly smart, caring person when Arthur Munisteri passed away on

August 4, 2019, in Northampton, MA. A longtime supporter and member

of CDSS, Art served on the boards of CDSS affiliates in New York and

Massachusetts. He was an avid, some might say fanatic, English, contra, and Morris

dancer, a sought-after waltz partner, and a proud member of the Greenwich Morris Men and the Pinewoods

Folk Music Club in New York City. He sang for many years in the New York Christmas Revels, and later in the

Cambridge MA Christmas Revels, and was often pleased to serenade dinner companions with well-wrought

selections from Gilbert & Sullivan. Arthur was well known for his repertoire of literary references, funny stories,

and recall of the details of everything he had ever read. He was a dear friend to many and will be greatly missed.



—Remembrance & photo by Nikki Herbst