

Viva Dance

There is something special about being around dancers. Could it be the rhythm or maybe the underlying beat? Whatever it is the positive energy is impossible to ignore.

At first glance Page Moss Baptist Church Hall doesn't look like an environment that would stimulate the creative leanings of your regular school age local resident and yet it does. Every Thursday and Friday around 40 children and young people burst through the doors to wrestle with the demanding disciplines of ballet, tap, modern jazz, hip hop and freestyle.

For the last five years Viva Performing Arts Community Interest Company has been taking a very different approach to developing and running a dance school:

- there's no strict uniform code, the school fundraises to print T-shirts for the children to wear
- there's no standard upfront termly fees, dancers pay as they go which helps with family cash flow
- there's no charge for missing class which means if you can't attend it doesn't cost anything and you don't lose your place
- when it comes to planning a show it's not the teachers who get to choose the music and decide the themes it's the pupils

Even though much of this practice flies in the face of conventional wisdom about how to make a dance school work Viva does work and has built an excellent reputation for high quality teaching and great exam results. This infectiously enthusiastic band, led by Mandy and ably supported by a small number of volunteer directors and sessional teaching staff, have a reach far beyond their local estate.

Dancers from Viva have performed at the Everton Football Club in the Community Awards and received an unexpected trophy. Performances from Viva opened and closed the Merseyside Police Awards event one year and during 2012 Viva played a part in the procession of the Olympic torch through Knowsley. Viva was part of the opening ceremony for the Leisure Centre in Stockbridge Village and regularly strut their stuff at local shows and events each summer.

Getting a show like this on the road has not been plain sailing by any means. There has been financial support from organisations such as the BIG Lottery and Children in Need and huge personal commitment from dancers, teachers and their families. There have also been tough times when there wasn't enough cash in the system to pay the room hire and Page Moss Baptist Church extended a helping hand to keep the doors open and the music playing.

Dance is so much more than fun – although fun matters a great deal at Viva. Dance improves the functioning of the brain by activating both thinking and doing at the same time. Studies have shown that taking regular dance classes boosts both mental health and mood and that these effects can last for up to 8 months after the end of the activity itself. In these days of concerns over childhood obesity, emotional wellbeing and educational attainment surely it is in all our best interests for Viva to survive and thrive.

Viva is well named. Viva comes from the Latin and is a salutation meaning Live! Viva Performing Arts is so much more than a simple dance company – this is a group of people inspired by the joy of life.

'One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar' Helen Keller