

## Becoming a Trustee with Ascendance

Ascendance is a Dance for Health Charity based in Leeds, Bradford and Yorkshire. Primarily working with people with Parkinson's, neurological conditions and older people, Ascendance runs an annual programme of community classes, outreach and workshops, digital work and a training and performance company – Fuse Dance Collective – who perform across the UK and develop their skills as choreographers, teachers and creative directors.

Ascendance aims to bring joy, creativity and connectivity to everything we do, and we are proud to have developed multiple partnerships and collaborations with artists and organisations across the North. These include Leeds Rhinos Foundation, Karmand Community Centre, Northern Ballet, Northern School of Contemporary Dance, Marie Curie Hospice and Bradford 2025.

Ascendance is operated by a team of paid employees, freelancers and volunteers and answer to the board of trustees, who are all volunteers.

### What are we looking for?

We believe the best work happens when passionate people from different backgrounds, communities and experiences come together with a shared goal. This is what we want for everything Ascendance does, including our Board of Trustees.

We want to hear from anyone who shares our values and believes in helping our charity improve the health and wellbeing of older adults. If you want to be part of our ambitions and want to support the development of our community company, Fuse Dance Collective, and if you want to help us reach more people with movement disorders and other conditions that affect mobility, please get in touch.

In addition, we have also identified some skills and experience that we think would enrich the diversity of our Board: **we definitely don't expect one person to have experience in all of these!**

- **experience in working in or creating disability-led arts, in particular those with movement disorders**
- **skills in developing and running arts projects** that are designed to welcome people who are often prevented from taking part
- **experience in working with young people**
- **experience in empowering communities** and bringing people together
- **expertise in running or managing a (small) business**
- **broad professional networks in Leeds / Yorkshire** – (*this might be in a specific area such as community arts, or local businesses*)

- **experience supporting the development of artistic talent** of (young) people or of those in the wider community
- **experience working in the performing arts sector, the arts sector, or the cultural sector** more broadly
- **never having worked in performing arts, theatre, arts or cultural sector**  
While the most important thing is that you share our passion for social change and global justice, **there are also some vital voices, viewpoints and experiences of our society** that we would like to increase on our current board of trustees throughout this process:
  - People **who identify as disabled**
  - **People with movement disorders**
  - People of **South Asian heritage**
  - People of **African or Caribbean heritage**
  - People who identify as **LGBTQ+**

### **Do I have to have experience of being on a Board?**

Definitely not! We welcome approaches from people who have and have not been on a board before. Everyone is provided with training that is matched to their experience, and we are looking to instigate a 'buddy' system for new board members, to help them find their feet if needed.

### **What do board members do?**

We need to be clear here – being a board member is a commitment of time and energy, but it can be an incredibly rewarding and valuable experience. The Charity Commission set out, broadly speaking, what they see as the six main duties for a trustee of a charity. They're pretty dry, and could be a bit intimidating, so we've tried to explain what they mean in the context of Ascendance:

- **Ensuring the charity is carrying out its purposes for public benefit** – *this could be things like asking the important questions that make sure we're doing the things that really matter for our audiences, communities and the people who work with us.*
- **Complying with the charity's governing document and the law** - *as it sounds... making sure we don't break the law*
- **Acting in the charity's best interests** – *using your judgement, experience, instinct and ideas to make sure that together we make the right decisions to get to where we want to be and make the change we want to see.*
- **Ensuring the charity is accountable** – *in a financial sense, but also that we stay true to our mission and objectives for the 'public good' as a charitable organisation*
- **Managing the charity's resources responsibly** - *being part of making sure our money is looked after and managed properly. You don't necessarily have to have a financial background or experience, as we try and make this information as clear as possible and you are encouraged to ask for support in helping you understand it if needed. Of course, if you are a financial expert, that's great too.*
- **Acting with reasonable care and skill** – *individual people have different skills, experience and interests that they bring to the table. It's important that we show one another mutual respect and understanding, and to be open to having (sometimes difficult) conversations with sensitivity and compassion.*

But we think there are so many other things that are part of being an Ascendance trustee:

- ***Coming along to see our events.***
- ***Meeting new people and being part of a community that shout about and encourage each other's work outside their trustee role***
- ***Thinking big about our future and what Ascendance could and should be in another 25 years***
- ***Being a vital part of conversations about the Dance that we make and why we make it – key to shaping the company***
- ***Using your particular expertise and experience to provide mentoring or support to a fun, friendly and generally fantastic staff team***

### **What sort of commitment is it?**

Board members are expected to attend board meetings four times a year, making sure to read the papers in advance and ask for further information and clarification when deemed necessary. Our board meetings currently take place on Zoom. Between meetings board members may be consulted on issues that arise and board members are expected to respond in a timely manner, even if only to say 'no comment'. Annual away day meetings are held in-person only and all members are expected to make every effort to attend these days in-person.

### **Duration of Board Membership**

We ask that members serve on the board for a minimum term of 2 years.

There are currently two standing Sub-Groups covering Finance and HR. Other Sub-Groups may be formed from time-to-time to address particular needs and/or time-limited projects or areas of work. Board members are expected to be available to join at least one of these Sub-Groups depending on need and any specialism. The role of a Sub-Group is to look at specific areas or projects in more detail and they may include co-opted members of staff or external individuals.

### **Do board members get paid?**

Board members of charities do not get paid to be on boards. However, the company will reimburse any reasonable expenses (e.g. travel/childcare) incurred by (e.g.) attending board meetings and Ascendance is committed to covering costs incurred by any additional (e.g. access) needs of prospective and current board members, such as BSL signing services.

### **Our current board members**

Our board is currently made up of four individuals from a range of personal and professional backgrounds in arts, culture and the community. Current members are Jan-Pieter Costima, Janet Mitchell, Teresa Widera and Sam McCormick. **Read more about our existing board members on our website here:** <https://ascendance.org.uk/meet-the-board/>

They all have one thing in common – they are passionate about the work of Ascendance!

## **What next? Register your interest**

We do hope that you have found all the information you need to fully consider joining our Board. The next stage is for you to get in touch to register your interest. When you do, we would love you to consider these three questions:

- Who are you?
- Why does the role interest you?
- What relevant skills or experience do you have that you would bring to the board?

We would expect no more than a couple of sentences for each question. Please provide links to existing work/CV and social media profiles to introduce yourself and give us a sense of your past work and experience.

You can send these answers over by email to [classes@ascendance.org.uk](mailto:classes@ascendance.org.uk)

Or if you could prefer to record a video or audio file, or send your answers to these questions in any other format then just get in touch.

**Deadline Feb 28<sup>th</sup> 2025**

## **Next steps**

Once you've got in touch, we'll organise a short informal chat – 30 mins on video conferencing software at a time to suit all parties. This will be with a member of the existing board and/or staff team to hear a little more about what is involved, discuss the current priorities of the board and the role in more detail. Following this we would arrange a visit to attend at least one Ascendance community class or performance to meet some of the team and see the work in action.

If we feel like it's the right fit for both parties, then we'll invite you to come to a board meeting, so you can make sure you are happy before officially joining the board.