

"It's actually a social justice issue, it's not just about switching the world on to that this group of dancers have something to offer creatively and have valuable stories to tell. It's also making sure that as artists, they can access the materials and the world to inform their work, because that world has not been designed with this group in mind."

Dr Belinda Johnson

| Social Equity Research Centre researchers | Dr Belinda Johnson, Dr Tamara Borovica |
|--|--|
| Project partners | Dancekin Collective |
| Funding body | Social Equity Research Centre Ideas Grant 2024 |



Dance can be a powerful tool for social change. It offers a compelling means of expression that resonates with people with disability. Dance fosters confidence, inclusion, and participation. Yet performance worlds are often not inclusive and continue to marginalise people with disability.

Led by Dr Belinda Johnson and Dr Tamara Borovica, and in partnership with inclusive dance facilitators, dance was explored as a form of human rights expression and disability-led creative practice.

In a series of workshops at WXYZ Studios, dancers with Down syndrome shaped the direction of the research — identifying what matters to them and what future dance opportunities could be. Intentions were clear: dancers want to perform, make digital content, collaborate with dancers of all abilities, and be recognised not just as participants in disability arts — but as artists in their own right.

This applied sociology project didn't just generate knowledge — it catalysed impact. From this research emerged the Dancekin Collective, a new Melbourne-based disability performance company led within the Down syndrome community. Dancekin Collective is continuously creating new work, performing at events, and preparing a show for Melbourne Fringe.

By having dancers with Down syndrome as co-creators and emerging co-researchers, the project advances inclusive, impact-driven research that shifts practice in real time. It also strengthens the bridge between disability and mainstream dance sectors.

At the Social Equity Research Centre, we believe creative practice is a powerful way to challenge assumptions and build equity. This is research that moves — and changes — the world.

"...ideally, we'd love to take the things that we learn and contribute that back and keep developing a global movement of a dance sector that can build capacity and opportunities for people with Down syndrome and ultimately bring that to the broader community who will benefit enormously from what they don't know they don't know."

Mx Tristan Sinclair, Dancekin Collective