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Hold Me Closer Tiny Dancer By Jo Fowler

“Since 2014 Fallen Angels has supported 349 individuals in recovery through dance” says Claire Morris, with justified pride and an energy and enthusiasm most of us could only dream of having.

Claire is founder, along with her husband Paul Bayes Kitcher, of ‘Fallen Angels’ Dance Theatre, an organisation, helping those in recovery from addiction and mental health problems through the medium of dance.

In her very positive way, constantly smiling, as her wavy, brown bob falls around her face, Claire explains that,

“Fallen Angels Dance Theatre (FADT) exists to support those in recovery from addiction to transform their lives and increase their confidence and self-esteem’....allowing a platform for achievement as well as helping them develop social networks in a safe and caring environment.”

Claire is the image of what I would expect a dancer to be; petite, toned, nimble and graceful and. as I bend down to hug her, I realise, tiny!

A trained dancer, Claire graduated from The Contemporary London Dance School and worked at The Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance before deciding that her future lie in working to help the community, through her passion of dance.

Claire tells me about one current participant, or ‘angel’ called Kelly.

“In the last year Kelly had gone through a really bad depression, which led to her going through the mental health system...She had gone into recovery and had dealt with a physical addiction, but never dealt with the problems that surrounded it, she just carried on. Then she came across, and started to talk

to, 'Fallen Angels'.

Kelly says, "Up until recently my life consisted of taking my kids to school, doing the shopping and I was a hermit at home. I didn't go out anywhere, I didn't do anything. So just coming to Fallen Angels first of all got me out of the house doing things, and then opened up other opportunities, to see what's around and has made me think where I want to be.... finding out that other people have gone through similar, really helps."

Kelly also talks about how in school holidays when there is no school so no childcare and so no dancing, Claire runs family dance workshops where the 'Angels' can still get out and get their dance fix and the kids can have fun.

Now with projects, in Chester, Leigh in Greater Manchester and Liverpool, Claire and Paul have plans for more projects in other parts of the North West, and are currently in residence with Fallen Angels at Chester's 'Storyhouse'.

"Art brings people together. It gives them experiences they would not normally have." Claire enthuses, as she begins to tell me about how it all began.

Beginnings

Claire met Co-Founder, and now husband, Paul in 2004, when he was teaching ballet at the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

"Paul's high school was 'The Royal Ballet School' in Richmond Park.' He was the original 'Billy Elliot'", she laughs fondly.

"Paul wasn't really very happy at this time. He was teaching ballet. He was always in a bit of trouble here and there. Eventually he thought it was his job and the ballet he was unhappy with, so he left and that's when things fell apart for him."

Paul hit rock bottom, and so began a spiral into addiction. When Claire met him again he had already been in rehab and was in recovery, teaching ballet once more and rebuilding his life.

A defining moment, which was integral in sowing the seeds of 'Fallen Angels', came when Paul was working in a rehab centre in 2011. Claire explains,

“One of the participants had painted a picture in prison of Christ being ripped apart. Paul, thinking it was an amazing piece of art asked if he could use it in the project.

The workshop participants wrote about what they saw in it, and this developed into a choreographed movement and dance piece.”

Paul filmed the piece and then showed it to the person who had painted it, who was, at this point, in recovery, and he broke down in tears on seeing the piece. This was the point at which Paul fully realised the power of dance and performance and, along with Claire, set about creating ‘Fallen Angels Dance Theatre’ via ‘Chapter.1. Battle For The Soul’ project.

Friends in high places.

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Still reeling from their recent big royal engagement at ‘Storyhouse’ where they performed for The Queen and Duchess of Sussex, which was both, “amazing and surreal”,

Claire and Paul are excited about the future of ‘Fallen Angels’ and what they feel they can achieve for, and with, the participants of their projects.

“Our current ambition and plan is to help many more individuals escape addiction and continue on to recovery through new sustainable projects...”

And they feel and hope that with their passion, determination and hard work, this is a totally feasible and likely plan.

And for Kelly? “My life is very busy, workshops, performances, involved with Chester Plus- volunteering and becoming a trustee, and Cheshire Recovery Federation planning a recovery walk, and other opportunities. A couple of weeks ago I met some people in recovery in Manchester...my friends and family network has grown so much.”

When we say goodbye, I ask Claire if she minds me referring to her as a ‘tiny dancer’ and Paul as Billy Elliot in the article. She throws her head back and with that amazing energy of hers, laughs and says,

“There are worse things to be called...”

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