

Carol Holtom – Partick group

August 2022



The past year has been an accelerated learning curve for me.

Some time after the Learning to Lead Sacred Dancing training at Findhorn in 2018, I tried to start a group in my local village. It went nowhere, but I was astonished to realise that my biggest reaction was relief. I knew that I simply wasn't ready. My impetus to start the group had come from a feeling of obligation. I had trained as a sacred/circle dance teacher. Why didn't I have a group?

I cannot fault the training at Findhorn; it was one of the most powerful experiences of my life. But a two-week course cannot cover everything, and I knew I was on very shaky ground as far as an adequate understanding of rhythm and reading step notes was concerned.

Before lockdown I had already signed up for Judy's course in November 2021. I knew at a gut level that it would meet my training needs and I was terrified – until almost the minute I got there – that it might have to be cancelled. In the way these things tend to happen when the time is ripe, before I travelled south, I was offered the chance to teach the Partick group from February 2022 onwards. The Partick Circle Dance Group is a community group which is committee run and which fulfils just about every one of my ideals as far as inclusion, empowerment and collaborative working are concerned. I wanted to give them as much as I possibly could.

Judy's course met my training needs and much more – and I have discovered that the Partick group meets my ideals and much more. It has been a joy and a privilege to work with them and to get to know each special member. Before teaching a group on a regular basis I was very fortunate that other teachers would give me a slot in their class so that I could improve my skills. It was what I needed but it also felt like a performance. I cannot convey the pleasure of having a regular group: feeling that I'm not performing, just getting on with the job, being able to work over several weeks on grounding a dance within our bodies, witnessing us all grow in confidence. I have learned through trial – and a great deal of hilarious error.

And because the Partick group looks outwards towards the community it gives me the opportunity to be involved in exciting events. In June the Partick group and the Anniesland group were invited to be involved in the Refugee Celebration at the Multicultural Centre in Glasgow. Katie and I had been given a slot to lead accessible dances, but before that - while we were waiting for the programme to properly start - a young Syrian man got up with some pals and led a dance. He was wonderfully athletic and most people there didn't know the dance, but other young men got up and tried to follow him, then some of our dancers got up, then some young women and gradually more and more people got up, so the 'give it a go' mood was set for the rest of the afternoon.

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When our slot came, we made it clear that circle dancing is not a spectator sport and we very much needed everyone to join in. The final dance was 'We Are Here' and by then nearly every single person in the room was up. All those different cultures; all those different languages; all those people with different colourful clothing. All those younger men and women we don't normally see in our circle dancing groups mixing in with our ageing but willing to go for it dancers. I could have cried with joy.