

Careers Corner

In our series on the wider world of dance-related professions, we take a look at the development of Dance Movement Psychotherapy and its many applications



Above: Sherry Lebed Davis

Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) is based on the theory that movement reflects a person's patterns of thinking and feeling. The psychotherapeutic use of dance and movement helps the individual engage creatively to aid their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. The therapist introduces new movement patterns and helps the individual work through the emotional experiences that accompany these changes.

Developmental Movement Therapy works in a similar way, based on evidence that each human baby should progress through a series of movements as it grows and develops through life. If this development process is disrupted by environmental, physical or emotional changes, this can lead to social difficulties and learning disabilities. By going through certain developmental movement patterns and consequently completing the individual's neurological

development, normal neurological function will return.

Dance Movement Psychotherapists work with individuals and groups in health, education and social service settings as well as working privately. Their clients range from people who are emotionally distressed to people with learning difficulties and people with physical or mental illnesses. It helps self-esteem, adaptive coping behaviours, physical and emotional shifts, as well as developing trusting relationships and enhancing social interaction skills. Although its origins are based in early human history, the establishment of dance therapy as a profession occurred in the 1950s.

Marian Chace is thought to be the founder of what is now dance therapy in the United States. After she opened her own dance school, she realised the effect dance had on her students. When she was asked to conduct dance therapy at St Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington DC, psychiatrists also realised the benefits their patients were receiving from