

A woman in traditional Burmese attire, featuring a long metal collar (gaingyi) and a colorful headscarf, is shown in a dynamic pose with her arms raised. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# THE HEALING DANCE PROGRAM -REFUGEES

Empowering Trauma Survivors,  
impacting lives and transforming the  
world through dance.

AUSTRALIA - THAILAND  
2017 - 2018

Annual Result



The Healing Dance Program Refugees AUS/THA  
2017 - 2018

Created /Produced and implemented by Samya Fraxe

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Maracass Holistic Dance & Healing

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



## **The Healing Dance Program -Refugees**

would like to express my gratitude for the collaborators and donors, for believing and supporting this program to spread love and make the world a dancing place. I do appreciate all support, all care of our global community and for warming the refugees' hearts.

**Your support was essential to make The Healing Dance Program - Refugees possible.**



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# MARACASS HOLISTIC DANCE & HEALING



**MARACASS HOLISTIC DANCE & HEALING** aims to empower people to connect and to transform their inner selves through dance and movement. Dance is an ancient art and a healing tool that has the power to heal deep traumas, to release tension and to celebrate life.

**OUR MISSION** is to contribute in developing a profound individual connection with body, mind, and heart. To bring a higher level of consciousness, equality, respect of the cultural plurality healing, and connecting people through dance. To spread beauty, kindness, and love around the world.



## **ABOUT THE FOUNDER : Samya Fraxe**

I am an artist, dancer, holistic therapist and Master in Anthropology. I have been supporting many hearts around the world to find and embrace their own rhythm, to express their uniqueness and to connect from a place of integrity; and to promote respect of cultural diversity through empathy, dance and movement in order to have a positive impact in our global community.

I dedicate my life to dance, research, writing, performing and teaching. I have had scientific articles published in Brazilian journals specialized in the anthropology of dance. I have taught hundreds of people from all corners of the world in several dance styles and places, including the renowned University of West Australia (UWA) in Perth/Australia, Thailand and now Greece.

Through my master's degree in Anthropology, I analysed the traditional dances of the Waiwai, an indigenous people from the Brazilian Amazon, which allowed me to understand in depth the healing powers of dancing and inspired me to share this ancient knowledge with the world. The result is the YourDance methodology and The Healing Dance Program , both created and developed by myself with an aim to heal, empower and improve people's lives.





**"The body is the door to connect  
to our essence"**

Samya Fraxe



# THE HEALING DANCE PROGRAM REFUGEES



**The Healing Dance Program - Refugees**, was created to empower and to support trauma survivors and refugees to allow them to connect with the best in themselves while improving mental health. To connect and to engage with the host country, to bring joy and hope into temporary settlements and to impact the world positively promoting empathy through dance and movement.

The United Nations recognises that we are now facing the worst humanitarian and refugee crisis since World War II. Nowadays there are 65.6 million displaced people due to the ongoing conflicts causing severe human rights violations with "nearly 20 people...forcibly displaced every minute as a result of conflict or persecution" (UNHCR). This humanitarian crisis is urging us to rethink the human dynamic and what we are doing about our relationships between one another. The humanitarian crisis we are facing is rooted in the lack of empathy, clouded judgement and unimaginable disregard for human life. The result? Livelihood degradation and an accompanying post-conflict mental health weakening for those impacted. We must act on the roots of this issue to change the results we are experiencing now.

Refugees frequently exhibit a high level of physical and emotional stress and trauma, the consequence of this can be depression or impulsivity, feelings of hopeless as well as social isolation. The good news is that a human being who goes through a traumatic experience, with the right support and mindset, can not only to survive, but can thrive. What they need is a place for healing, to recover, to stand on their feet and to be able to support themselves once again.

"The mental health of refugees and asylum-seekers is a critical part of their overall well-being, and an important factor in their positive integration into a new community." (UNHCR). Refugees experience challenges in adaptation broadly across varied file domain; traditional clinical based treatment may be insufficient to meet their need" (Chung, Benak, Okazaki 1997; Miller 1999 p 5). Not all their pain can be verbalised. There is some pain that cannot be expressed in words in their native language let alone in the presence of a language barrier. To address this issue efficiently it is essential to adopt an appropriate non-verbal method. While traditional avenues, counselling and therapy, are important, on their own they do not provide a holistic remedy.

The Healing Dance Program uses dance and the body to release, transform and heal the wounds left over from traumatic experiences. Dance increases blood flow and serotonin production which is an essential chemical for wellbeing produced in the brain. This expression of art relaxes the body, promotes satisfaction, happiness and confidence. Dance also improves neuroplasticity which is responsible for the ability of the brain to learn, grow, and facilitate creativity.

This program has an immediate impact and relief in people lives since the first class, but it also requires an ongoing practice to transform the whole patters and limited believes opening the space for empowerment and mental health improvements in a long term. Due to that, the Healing Dance Program also provides teaching training for people in the communities and organizations we partner up with to ensure an ongoing practice can be facilitated.



All classes follow the YourDance-Healing Dance methodology designed by Samya Fraxe - Maracass Holistic Dance & Healing. With a holistic approach, I hold a safe space free of judgment encouraging the participant to trust themselves to move freely by letting their bodies release the old movement patterns that store stagnated energy, allowing them to tell their stories through movements. Everyone's body has the capacity to self-heal, my job is to just to introduce and support this process so that those affected by conflict can begin to heal themselves.

So far, the Healing Dance Program has successfully supported three ethnic groups in 2 countries in differing settlement contexts. Through this program, it has qualified six new dance facilitators and brought up millions of smiles in only one year. Each group was given a tailored approach that took note of their specific circumstances. Here, empathy plays a fundamental role in engaging with the groups; they have a different cultural background and different needs which are analysed, understood and respected by the dance facilitator. Different posture and language (body language) was adopted to connect with the different communities, this connection comes from a heart space, it's a connection between human beings; honoring, respecting and appreciating them for who they are regardless any circumstances. Most of them are non-English speakers, so when facilitating, I learned few basic words in their language to connect with them. The effort I put to learn their language with accent was a reason for laughter which helped break barriers and connect to each other from a very positive place: getting us ready for the healing dance.



# GOALS



**The Healing Dance Program - Refugees** primary goal is to encourage people to embrace life; we believe that when people decide to embrace themselves, to express their gifts and skills the whole world gets the benefits of it. With that in mind, our mission is to:

1. **Empower** refugees and traumas survivors.
2. **Bring happiness** to people's lives: happy people have a positive effect on the community and world around them.
3. **Support** refugees and trauma survivors to tap into their creativity and **to develop a more positive approach to life.**



4. **Encourage** refugees and trauma survivors to re-frame their reality into a new and positive one.
5. **Support** refugees and trauma survivors **to release** the old patterns of stress and trauma accumulated and held within their bodies.
6. **Ignite a sense of community** through the group dynamic of the classes
7. Through all the above, the overarching goal of **improving the mental health** of refugees and trauma survivors.
8. **Implement "training the trainer"** in the community to keep the classes and the healing process going after the conclusion of the program.



# THE HEALING DANCE PROGRAM -REFUGEES

## PERTH- WA/ AUSTRALIA



**The Healing Dance Program -Refugees** in Perth Australia was in partnership with ASETTS (Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors) that provides holistic services to assist refugee survivors of torture and trauma to rebuild their lives.

We have supported two ethnic groups, one from Myanmar (Siyan group from Chin State) and another one from Syria; Most of them had a permanent visa, and a few of them are now Australian citizens but are still struggling with inclusion and engagement within their new host country. These groups have freedom of movement, but they have lost the social and family connections which are leading them to social isolation, depression and the feelings of hopelessness.



## SIYAN GROUP - CHIN GROUP



**Classes held From 19/05/2017 to 04/08/2017  
At Mirrabooka community centre in Perth /Australia.**

**The Siyan group** is a strong, sweet and joyful group of 'hill people' from the Chin State in Myanmar. They are traditionally Animist, and the expression of this culture can be seen in their movements. For ethnic groups with an Animist background movement is even more essential for healing purposes. They have music and movement as part of their daily lives and express themselves mostly through body language. In truth, their speeches follow their hands when they are telling stories and not the opposite, it is fundamental understand this perspective to choose the best type of therapy to engage with groups with Animism as their background.

Their movements are inspired by harvest activities, they perform any situation imitating people in a caricature type of way to express connection, gratitude, appreciation or even power over someone in a situation: having a lot of fun doing it while showing understand and appreciate the other person.

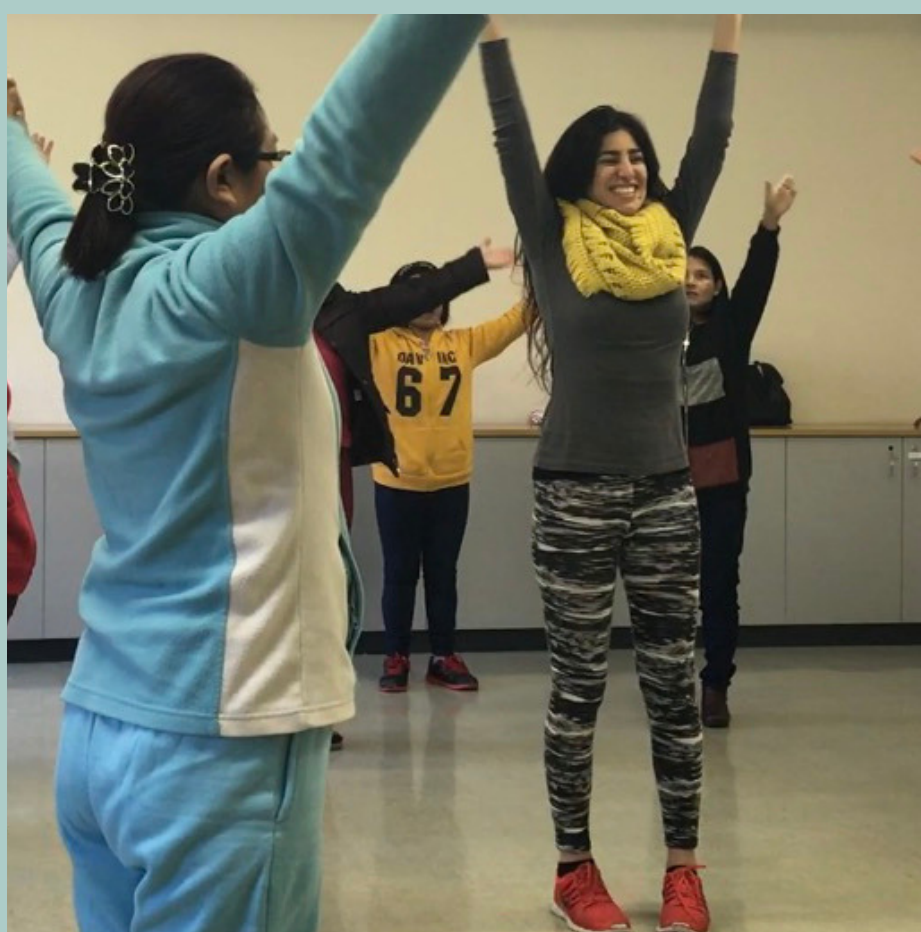


They were caricaturing each other and myself in the group during classes. While mimicking the army marching, they made an angry facial expression and were stepping their feet heavily on the floor singing "right, left, right", following this with a lot of laughter. This was a great release and a profound healing moment where they were able to laugh at otherwise traumatic memories; this is the power of the Healing Dance Program. This then of course means that the other participants were all trying to outdo and outlaugh each other; generating a lively and entertaining atmosphere. In one particular class, we started focusing on making funny shapes and forms to keep the laughter up, when this happened they would say 'nuam cip', which means "I feel good".

Each class was different in elements and movements as well in emotions. They brought up their traditional dance (either from Siyan group or from Burma more generally), music and the games that they used to play in their childhood, as well some Christian songs. They were happily and proudly showing me their culture, their stories, teaching me how to play their games and how to move like them. At our last class they brought in traditional food to share and also a scarf unique to their ethnic group to share with me and my filmmaker as a symbol of appreciation. By trying their movements on my body, eating their food and wearing their clothes, we developed a deeper connection that further opened the channel for healing. They were feeling valuable, confident and joyful once again.



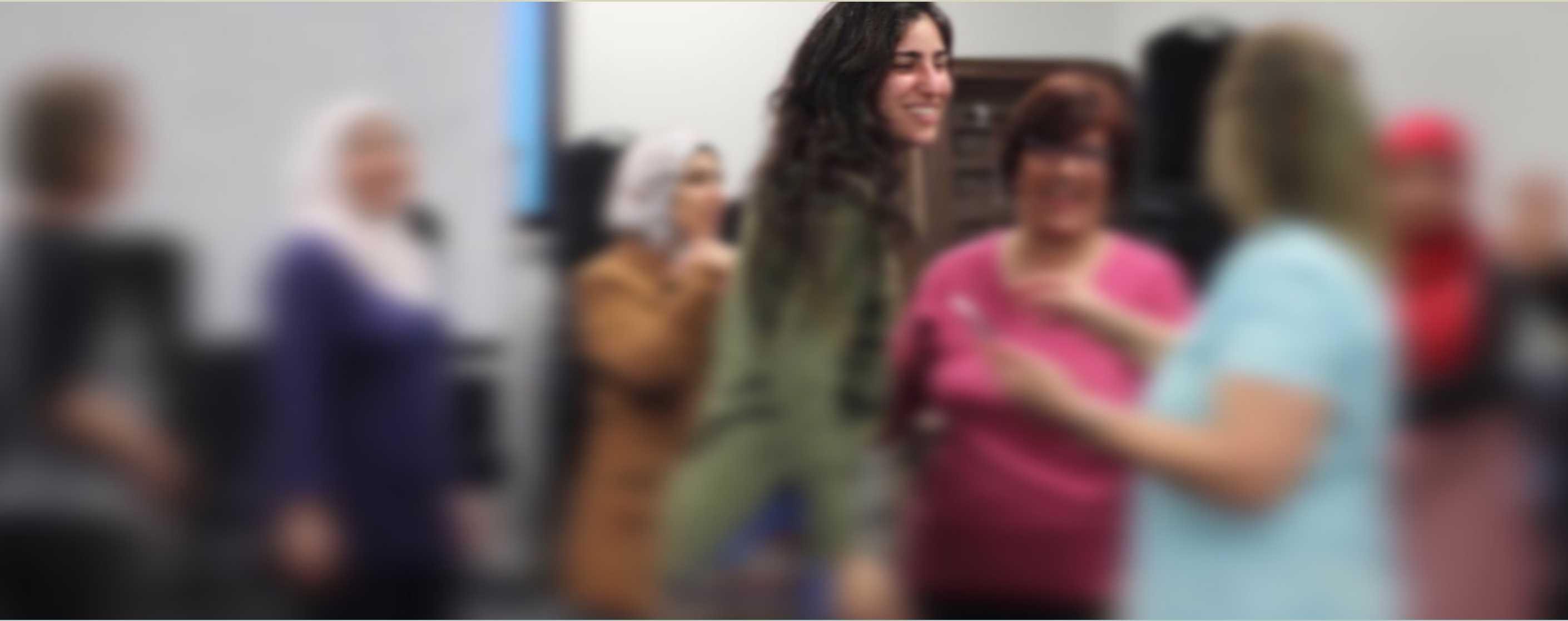
# SYIAN GROUP - CHIN GROUP IN ACTION



Photos by Pedro Prado; Samya Fraxe



## SYRIAN GROUP



**Classes held From 18/07/2017 to 29/08/2017 after Ramadan  
At Stirling community centre in Perth/ Australia**

**\*Please note, that there is no many pictures of the Syrian group in this  
document for religious/ cultural reasons.**

**The Syrian group** are lovely and graceful. The classes started after the Ramadan period. We practiced mainly belly dancing, in which I have over 15 years of experience, but also very often Dabuka came up. I am the third generation of a Syrian couple that migrated to Brazil due to the Franco war.

When I first start the class they were asking me where I came from due to our similar appearance. I explained that I came from Brazil but that my mother's family came from a small village in Hamas in Syria and one participant came to talk to me because she also came from Hamas; a profound moment for both of us. It was a great pleasure and honour to share their stories, culture and dance with them.



Each class was different in elements and movements as well. From the moment I played the Arabic songs they were smiling, dancing and singing. As did the group from Myanmar, they were proud in showing me their culture through dance. They were also very curious of other dance styles; they asked me to teach some Latin dance movements, which I did. I'll never forget what one of the participants said: "teacher, thank you so much! I feel myself so free, I am feeling good even if is for one hour...I am feeling great, I am feeling free."

For this group coming from a middle eastern culture, the way they look while dancing is important, and they find pride and worth in looking and feeling beautiful and exuberant. They were always well dressed and wearing makeup, they arrived at the dance class earlier and were socialising with each other, chatting, putting makeup on and doing their eyebrows. One day at the end of the class one of the participants said: "come here teacher let me do your eyebrow". And I did! By being open to see their stories through their bodies, through their cultural perspective and to be there to share a moment of joy it was enough to build the connection that they need to support themselves throughout their week. Those moments make them feel good about themselves, it works as a reminder of who they are regardless of any outside condition or circumstance they may be going through.



# THE HEALING DANCE PROGRAM -REFUGEES

## MAE HONG SON / THAILAND



**The Healing Dance Program - Refugees** in Mae Hong Son in Thailand was in partnership with AKAMAE, which is a co-created fashion brand that have been empowering refugees through their traditional skills and connecting them to the global community. We have supported the Kayan people living in a village called Kayan Tayar next to the temporary shelter BAAN MAI NAISOI in Mae Hong Son. Kayan people are an ethnic minority group from Myanmar also known as the "Long neck" tribe. They are also traditionally Animist but since converted to Christian. Many of them migrated to Thailand in 1988 to escape from war and persecution; moving to temporary settlements. Currently, there are approximately 9,926 people ([reliefweb.int/may2017](http://reliefweb.int/may2017)) living in BAAN MAI NAISOI, and some of them were relocated to small villages next to the camp by the Thai government which saw tourism opportunities. These were mostly women and children and even now, they still have restricted freedom of movement.



Here, the context is different than with the groups in Australia where they are living scattered in the city and missing the community connection. In Thailand, the refugees live in small villages and since their movement is restricted, have a strong community bond. They support each other, take care of the children that have lost their parents and make decisions on the future of their village and children together. Social connection here is not a problem, but they are missing autonomy and agency, and feel trapped within their villages. The lack of movement bears heavy on their shoulders. In this context the individual and collective are mixed and they want to have more space to express themselves as an individual; the issue here is about the sense of persona, "who I am in this collective?".

As a result they suffer with very low self-esteem at the individual level. It was common to hear from them phrases such as "I am not valuable", "I am not good", "I am only a refugee". They became used to the fact that their purpose as an object of tourism where tourists come to see them because of the "long neck" rather than their unique attributes and traits as human beings. This fact again reinforces the idea of a collective identity and existence over the individual.



## KAYAN GROUP



Classes held From 02/12/2017 to 16/03/2018  
At Kayan Tayar village in Mae Hong Son/ Thailand.

When **The Healing Dance Program -Refugees** arrived at the village and asked them if they would like to dance, I was surprised to find that most of the people in the village were excited to come and dance together, even those that were 5 to 60 years old participated. They are creative dancers and they organise shows for themselves in the village performing choreographies that they have created. I had the privilege to participate in the Christmas show and I got a sense of how the whole village were involved whether through dancing, singing or watching.



The regular dance sessions were attended by mostly children and teenagers; which make up the majority of the population in the village. Even after some of the men of the village would return from a hard day of labour in the jungle some of them joined the circle to dance with us. When we were dancing, the smiles, the sparkling in their eyes, the peaceful face and their personal and unique movements was instantly noticeable. The free form of movement with no doubts or hesitations gave them more hope. They finally had a space to connect and express themselves as a unique being.

We have qualified five participants in the village plus the CEO of AKAMAE as "YourDance- Healing Dance" facilitators to keep the ongoing improvement of mental health, self-esteem and to hold the space for them to connect to their uniqueness to express themselves as an individual.



# KAYAN GROUP IN ACTION



Photos by Petecar; Piotr Frala; Roxane Gratton; Sophie Van Houtte.



# CHALLENGE



**The following challenges are actually what make the program unique and engaging.**

## **1. Language barrier**

Around 95% of the participants so far have been non- English speakers.

The program uses a non-verbal communication method to access the participant and foster inclusion. All that is needed was one or two person who speak English to help with translations so that dates for the dance sessions can be set. During the dance activities itself translation are not required.

## **2. Different cultural background**

I have worked with 3 different groups each possessing different realities and cultural backgrounds. It required flexibility, openness and a willingness to connect with people from a place of understanding and love. As an anthropologist I have over the years developed the tools and techniques to quickly understand and instantly connect with participants.



## OUTCOME



**The Healing Dance Program -Refugees** was effective in sharing smiles, joy, emotional release and the healing of past traumatic experiences. All the movements expressed were expressions of their lived experiences either past or present; they were telling stories with their bodies while simultaneously healing themselves in the process.

The groups in Australia were craving movement and social connection and in Thailand for expressing their individuality. This program was flexible enough to address the unique specificities of each group whether in Australia or in Thailand.

Dance goes beyond the physical benefits. The dance session delivered was a place for connection, for expression, for release, for empowerment, a place of healing, of joy and finally a place of freedom.

There has only been positive feedback, from the participants and from the organizations we have partnered up with (ASETTTS and AKAMAE). All participants from the three groups said that they were happier and feeling more confident while, and after, dancing with Maracass.



## WIDER IMPACT



**The Healing Dance Program -Refugees** is quick and easy to implement and take part in while being powerful in its ability to provide trauma relief and empowerment. It is flexible in that it can be applied in different settlement contexts and can continue indefinitely once local teachers become qualified through the program to then lead the space for themselves. Benefits flow on to the host community too through more positive interactions with an energised and confident refugee community.

Participants in the program reported that they feel more valuable and have the confidence necessary to engage with their host society, share their skills and contribute to the local economy.



## SUCCESSFUL RESULT



**The Healing Dance Program -Refugees** classes were delivered with an open heart and an inclusive environment. I honour them for who they truly are, not for any label or circumstances. I honour their strength, vulnerabilities, creativity, flexibility and their rich traditional skillset. This has helped to remind them of their values and increase self-esteem during classes. The connections we have made are simple human connections; I open myself to them and they feel comfortable and safe to open themselves to me. From this genuine place we both are ready for the healing. It is important to understand that we are all the same. Yes! Sure, we have different experiences but we all can benefit from healing at some level and during a **Maracass Holistic Dance & Healing** workshop, space for each other is created which allows connection and trust to share our stories and heal through dance to happen.