

May Productions

## The Bristol VR team making dance accessible to everyone - from home

*A year-long project, **In-Body**, is creating an online community exploring dance and the senses, connecting with people who are house-bound, shielding, or restricted in their activities by the pandemic and other health challenges.*

### SEPTEMBER 2021

Three months into the **Arts Council England-funded** dance and VR project, *Remodelling Soma*, the project's online interactive element, *In-Body*, has reached the milestone of 30 participants. Since June 2021, dancers including Laila Diallo, Ben McEwen, and Anne-Gaelle Thiriot have created and shared monthly 'invitations' - directed movement sequences to explore participants' sensory perceptions via text, audio and film. The invitations are shared online, via an on-demand subscription platform. The **pay-what-you-decide** model seeks to make dance accessible at home, with the project **designed with people who are shielding, as well as those who are visually impaired, in mind**. Each invitation uses dancers' specialisms to create a **relaxed, at-home space for people to connect with their senses and the local environment**, and feel **connected to others taking part too**.

The '**In-Body Diary**' has become a focal point for the project with participants sharing images, text, and audio with each other. The team are keen to ensure that visually-impaired people can also enjoy *In-Body* in full, with audio and text versions of each script available and a broad range of senses explored, plus image and video descriptions for visual content shared on the platform and social media. Through consultation with visually-impaired dancers and potential participants, *In-Body* is also part of **key research investigating the accessibility and inclusivity of VR and other technology through dance and movement**.

Dancer Holly Thomas, who is visually impaired and whose invitation will be released at the end of September, said, "I'm really excited to be a part of *In-Body*, it's an innovative project that blends technology and dance beautifully, without needing participants to be experts in either. I hope that by sharing the invitations, we're encouraging more people to incorporate movement into their lives, even if they've previously faced barriers to doing so." Holly's movement practice explores sensory perception and embodied description, which it's hoped will be valuable for visually impaired people taking part.

Participants already signed up have approached *In-Body* from all walks of life, with **almost half of participants reporting that they have previously experienced barriers to working with technology and/or the creative arts**. It's hoped that in the next nine months, *In-Body* will be able to reach many more participants and successfully demonstrate that dance is a powerful tool for connecting with other people online. *Remodelling Soma* will soon be exploring the use of technology and virtual reality in other contexts, working with young people to produce new work, and preparing a final showcase in May 2022.

To take part, go to <https://in-body.co.uk> and click Sign Up.

**ENDS**

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### **Notes to editors**

**Images can be found here:**

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ZLmW7PXzAWN7Ct1KHxvWrHDX-fgSnJY?usp=sharing>

**For further comment, interview requests or other information:**

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**About *In-Body* and the Soma Project**

*Remodelling Soma* is the latest development of the Soma Project, led by dance artist and researcher Lisa May Thomas. The year-long programme of practice, participation and research will explore the ways in which we connect to our bodies, to each other and to the environment around us. Combining movement and dance practices and immersive multi-person Virtual Reality, we are looking to find pathways for these connections in our senses and investigate how these interior and exterior worlds, our relationships and sense of embodied agency within them, are mediated by technologies. The project will take place through online and in-person residencies and participatory events across three areas of activity, the first of which is *In-Body*.