

## **2026 Progress Report**

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**Project: Dance Movement Therapy for People Living with Mild Cognitive Impairment**

I am delighted to share an update on my PhD research project, which is supported by the **2025 Graduate Women New Zealand Fellowship**.

The central goal of my research is to examine Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) as a non-pharmacological approach to supporting individuals with mild cognitive impairment (MCI). I am particularly interested in how therapeutic movement and creative expression may help people remain engaged, connected, and confident in their daily lives. MCI involves noticeable changes in memory and thinking and can place individuals at higher risk of developing dementia. However, it also represents an important window of opportunity for early, supportive intervention. My research seeks to understand whether DMT can offer a meaningful way to enhance well-being, emotional resilience, and social connection for people experiencing these early cognitive changes.

During the current reporting period (July 2025 – January 2026), I have focused on two key areas:

- Conducting a comprehensive scoping review of existing research
- Undertaking an exploratory qualitative study through interviews with professionals and family members

An important first step was to examine what research already exists in this field. After careful screening, none of these studies met the inclusion criteria for my review of DMT intervention and people living with MCI. Although this was not the result I expected, it clearly demonstrates a significant gap in current research. These findings confirm the importance and originality of this project and reinforce the need for focused investigation in this area. I am currently submitting this scoping review for publication.

To better understand current experiences and needs, I have been conducting in-depth interviews with people directly involved in supporting individuals with MCI. These conversations have been both insightful and inspiring. They are helping me to understand the real-life challenges families face, as well as the possibilities that DMT may offer. I am currently recruiting participants, particularly family members and caregivers of those who are living with memory loss and MCI, to ensure their voices are well represented in the research.

In 2026, I will be presenting preliminary findings at three international conferences:

- The Australasian Society for Behavioural Health and Medicine in February in Auckland
- The International Conference on Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Diseases – Advances in Science & Therapy in March in Copenhagen
- The International Dementia Conference in June in Sydney

These presentations will provide valuable opportunities to exchange ideas and build connections with others working in similar research fields.

I would like to express my gratitude to the **Graduate Women New Zealand Trust** for your generous support. Your support has made a meaningful difference to my academic journey, and I am deeply grateful for your belief in this project's success. Receiving this Fellowship has been both an honour and an encouragement. The Fellowship allowed me to travel and attend the conferences listed above. It has enabled me to dedicate time and energy to this research. It has reinforced my commitment to developing approaches that can genuinely benefit individuals and families affected by memory loss and other cognitive impairment conditions.

The financial assistance, camaraderie, and encouragement I have received have been invaluable to me. This support has not only enabled me to continue my studies and share knowledge, but has also affirmed the importance of empowering women in education. I look forward to one day giving back in a meaningful way and helping other women pursue and achieve their own academic aspirations.

With deep gratitude,

Ann Way (H T An Tran) - 2026