



## Dance and the Healthy Living Agenda

### **History of the DAZL project**

Dance Action Zone Leeds or DAZL as it is most commonly known was a Health Action Zone funded project that was established in March 2000. It started as an initiative developed by the Women and Children's Planning Officer and Yorkshire Dance to focus on improving the health of young women through dance activity in targeted areas of disadvantage in Leeds. Yorkshire Dance decided not to remain involved and it became a partnership project undertaken by South Leeds Arts College - Merlyn Rees, and the DAZL Director working with local health services and Primary Care Trusts. The original target areas were the areas of Middleton and Belle Isle in South Leeds and Inner West Leeds. Target areas have varied over the 3 years that DAZL has existed but areas of deprivation in South Leeds have always remained the main focus.

### **Aims of DAZL**

#### **Primary Aim**

To improve the mental and physical health of young women aged 8 - 25 years through dance activity in disadvantaged communities in South Leeds.

#### **Secondary Aims**

- Improve the mental and physical health of the wider community through dance and performing arts related activity across Leeds
- Improve young women's access to exercise and health information
- Work in partnership with other community and arts and public sector organisations across the city

### **Objectives of the project**

The project has twin objectives; the primary objective is to engage girls aged 8 - 25 years from disadvantaged areas in dance activity. The second objective is to target the wider community including work with teenage mothers, boys and cultural cohesion work. DAZL attempts to develop dance activity that has long-term sustainability where possible.

The objective of DAZL's work is not to engage a select few in dance but to attract large numbers of young women of 'all shapes and sizes' who would not normally attend a private dance school. The key approach taken by DAZL is to work within youth culture and start where the youth are. Popular music and MTV/Street dance styles can excite the interest of even the most disaffected young person and DAZL's work uses Street dance to engage disaffected and disadvantaged young people.

Through this they get involved in regular physical activity and also create high quality dance productions. Performing can boost the confidence and self-esteem of young people at a key time in their life. This is particularly important as many of the young people come from backgrounds where there is a lack of aspiration or positive role models.

The Health Education Authority cites girls aged 12 - 16 years of low socio-economic status as a high priority group for health intervention. This target group is notoriously difficult to engage in physical activity. Merlyn Rees High Community School identified this as a major problem with a significant number of girls constantly avoiding taking part in PE. However ten years of youth dance development by DAZL and Yorkshire Dance has shown that street dance forms are highly appealing to girls in disadvantaged areas. Head Teacher Mrs S. Kay (2001) also noted that the DAZL dance project was unusual in attracting the more disaffected girls to participate.

The DAZL project aims to improve the mental and physical well being of young women through participation in dance, promoting their social inclusion and reducing health inequalities affecting them. Dance is a powerful art form for improving health; developing fitness, flexibility and coordination as well as enhancing self-esteem, confidence and improving self-image. Dance is creative and allows young people to explore their sense of identity or self-image. This is particularly important for socially excluded young people whether Black, White or Asian and can be an effective vehicle for developing cultural cohesion

## **DAZL Projects**

- Regular after school dance sessions for young people 9 -16 years at Primary and High Schools in the South Leeds area. The projects involve creating productions and performing as well as regular dance sessions.
- Establishing and supporting Youth Dance Groups in the South Leeds area. Organising Showcase and performance events for the groups.
- Holiday youth dance programmes in the target areas that are creative yet accessible and appealing to young people.
- Community Dance Leadership training courses run by DAZL for young adults with dance skills from local communities who are interested in leading dance activity. DAZL trainees are also supported to set up and run independent youth dance groups.
- DAZL Youth Dance and Music Projects for young people aged 16 - 25 years. Focus on MTV style street dance and singing projects. Young adults take part in regular sessions creating live productions and videos.
- **Dance and health initiatives** involving health professionals working with DAZL to deliver health information or interventions through dance projects. These have included working with a dance tutor and a school nurse. The dance attracts the young people to the project and part of the session each week is given over to activities that engage young people in health education. These have particularly focused on supporting year 6 pupils in transition to high school.

- **Dance and health performance projects** have also proved successful. These have usually involved a health professional working alongside a choreographer and taking a health related issue as a theme to develop a dance or physical theatre production. Productions have been created around issues including bullying, healthy eating, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse. Creating the performance engages the young people actively in the issue which means their learning is visual, audio and kinaesthetic. They are often more interested in the information they receive from the health professional, as they are actively involved with creating dance about it. They are also more likely to feel personally committed to the issue through presenting the issue through a live performance.

## The Healthy Living Agenda

The latest government White Paper has chosen to prioritize improving physical activity levels of the general population as a key target. As part of the Choosing Health agenda increasing physical activity levels alongside improving the diet of the population and promoting healthy living will become a major focus for health services and other public sector services. This is due to the worrying trends showing that the population are becoming increasingly more overweight. Research has shown that we are on the verge of an “epidemic of obesity” that will have huge future cost implications for the NHS. An inactive and overweight population will mean an increase in incidences of coronary heart disease, which will cost the NHS billions of pounds in the future.

### **Current Facts on Coronary Heart Disease and Physical Activity:**

- Coronary Heart Disease is the single most common cause of death in the UK, accounting for 24% of premature deaths in men and 14% of premature deaths in women.
- Regular physical activity or improved cardio-respiratory fitness decreases the risk of cardiovascular disease mortality in general and coronary heart disease mortality in particular.
- Individuals who are active are 1.9 times less likely to have a heart attack than their inactive contemporaries.<sup>1</sup>
- Estimates have shown that 37% of CHD deaths can be attributed to physical inactivity<sup>2</sup>

(Information from BHF National Centre for Physical Activity and Health -Physical Activity and Health Toolbox)

Children and young people are considered to be a crucial target as currently over 20% of children and young people are overweight or obese. More worrying still is that if the current trends continue it is estimated that 30% of children and young people could be obese by 2020. The patterns of physical activity established as a child tend to remain lifelong patterns so focussing interventions on children and young people will be important.

Young women take less exercise and are less fit than young men and are therefore an important target group. Research by the BHF National Centre for Physical Activity and Health found that only 42% of girls compared to 61% of boys reached the recommended levels of physical activity to benefit their health. Dance activity is therefore significant as it is effective in engaging young women. Young women from disadvantaged areas are an even higher risk group and youth dance work has been shown to be successful in disadvantaged communities by DAZL and many other community dance projects.

## **Physical Activity and Health Toolbox**

The BHF National Centre for Physical Activity and Health has been working on a Physical Activity and Health Toolbox as part of our partnership work with Sport England. The toolbox has been designed in order to support professionals in making the case for physical activity and health. It includes a series of user friendly fact sheets and accompanying slides on key issues in sport, physical activity and health which can be adapted for use with different audiences. See [www.bhfactive.org.uk](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk) for access to this.

Research carried out by DAZL on the health benefits of community dance is also accessible on the web as further evidence of how dance can help to deliver the healthy living agenda. See [www.leedsmet.ac.uk/ces/lss/DAZL](http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/ces/lss/DAZL)

## **The Healthy Living Agenda and Youth Dance**

Youth dance could have an important part to play in the new healthy living agenda. Public and voluntary sector organisations across the country will be encouraged to engage with this agenda. Dance has proven it has the potential to excite the interest of young people and get them active and therefore opportunities to develop and expand youth dance should flourish.

Raising the profile of youth and community dance will be crucial as many health organisations will tend to think physical activity means sports and will not consider dance. Engaging young people with sedentary lifestyles will also need to be shown to be achievable through dance as this will be the target group most key to reach.

Primary Care Trusts in 20 areas in the country will receive Spearhead funding to address the Healthy Lifestyles agenda. There are also other health funding streams expected to support healthy lifestyle projects that youth dance may be particularly well placed to engage with. Sport England is also expected to have increased funds for after school activities and is engaging with a wide range of physical activities including dance.

It is an exciting time for youth dance to engage with the new health agendas and to be proactive in making new partnerships with health services.

### **References.**

1. Blair, S.N. et al. (1992) How much physical activity is good for health? Annual Review of Public Health, 13, 99-126.
2. Britton, A. & McPherson, K. (2002) Monitoring the progress of the 2010 target for CHD Mortality: Estimated consequences on CHD incidence and mortality from changing prevalence of risk factors. London: National Heart Forum.

## Numbers of Young People Participating in Dance Activity through the DAZL Programme - 2002- 2003

Name of Project/Session	Number of Girls Participating	Number of Boys Participating	Number of Hours of Participation Per year	Postcode %'s for South Leeds areas	Age Range of Group	Total No. of Person Hrs of Dance
DAZL 16/25 Project	12	3	40	LS10 - 50%+	16 - 25	600
Peer Mentoring Project in Primary Schools	5	0	60	LS10 - 80%+	10 - 16	300
Street Jazz Dance Class 16 years	8	0	60	LS10 - 80%+	16 - 45	480
Youth Dance Group Belle Isle	13	2	60	LS10 - 80%+	8 - 13	900
DAZL Summer School	30	8	25	LS10 - 80%+	8 - 16	950
Flash Summer School	25	4	60	LS11 - 70%+	8 - 16	1740
Allerton Grange High School Youth Dance	20	0	15	Mixed + LS8, LS7	13 -16	300
Merlyn Rees Youth Dance / Rock Challenge	45	0	150	LS10 - 80%+	11 - 16	6750
Matthew Murray High School Youth Dance	10	1	10	LS11 - 70%+	12 - 16	100
Bruntcliffe High School	18	0	70	Mixed + LS 26 LS27	11 - 16	1260
Rodillian High School	20	0	70	Mixed + LS 26 LS27	13 - 16	1400
Clapgate Primary School	20	0	36	LS10 - 80%+	10 -11	720
Blackgates Primary School	25	0	30	LS27 - 60%+	10 -11	750
Ingram Rd Primary School	16	4	20	LS11 - 70%+	10 -11	400
Middleton St Mary's	12	3	12	LS10 - 80%+	10 -11	180
Coburn High School Youth Dance	20	0	20	LS10 - 30%+ LS11 - 30%+	13 - 16	400
Street Fusion	25	0	140	LS10 - 40%+ LS8 - 30%	13 - 16	3500
Street Fusion	20	5	200	LS10 - 30%+ LS8 - 40%+	16 - 25	5000
Trainees -Independent Youth Dance Groups						
DANCE XPRESS	30	0	160	LS10 - 80%+	10 - 16	4800
Mixed Spice	15	0	54	LS10 - 80%+	8 - 13	810
Hunslet Youth dance Co	20	0	80	LS10 - 6%+	6 - 16	1600
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1372</b>			<b>32940</b>

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