

Dance for Health, Well-being and Empowerment of Young People

Findings from a longitudinal study
with youth from deprived urban areas

YORKSHIRE
DANCE



June 2018



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

yorkshiredance.com



3	Executive summary
7	Acknowledgements
8	Young people and neighbourhood deprivation: The bigger picture
10	Project aims
10	Project methodology
14	Descriptive summary of findings
22	Implications and recommendations

Dr Shaunna Burke

Dr Andrea Utley

Dr Sarah Astill

School of Biomedical Sciences,
The University of Leeds

A partnership between
The University of Leeds and
Yorkshire Dance, funded by
Arts Council England

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dance for Health, Well-being and
Empowerment of Young People

Dance for Health, Well-being and Empowerment is a two-year research project investigating the impact of participation in an innovative youth dance company programme on the health, well-being and sense of empowerment of young people and their families who live in deprived communities in Leeds.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and context

This was the third collaborative research project between The University of Leeds and Yorkshire Dance, a dance development organisation based in Leeds and working across the Yorkshire region and the North.

Yorkshire Dance has delivered a youth company programme in East Leeds for 7 years. The organisation has committed to working in East Leeds specifically because it is an area of deprivation, which is closely adjacent to its home on Quarry Hill, providing access to the cultural quarter for young people who normally wouldn't access it. Over the last 3 years this programme has focused on a particular youth company model, which sees young people create new work, which they then perform in their communities.

The grant criteria facilitated research on existing activity only, which means that the research was added to an existing programme of work.

The Yorkshire Dance Youth company programme emphasised community engagement and access. This included a rolling recruitment with new young people joining in alongside long-standing members.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Methodology

This study used a longitudinal research design involving both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate how dance impacted on the health, well-being and sense of empowerment of young people from East Leeds. Multiple methods were used to collect data from the perspective of youth dance participants, parents, teachers, and dance tutors. This research project enabled the team to work in unprecedented detail and depth with an ethnographer who was able to invest significant time over a 10 month period observing, interviewing and dancing with the young people: a tremendous asset and luxury in an arts context.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of findings

- Dance helped the young people build confidence in their dance abilities and discover what their bodies were capable of doing, regardless of their skill level.
- Dance helped the young people to manage their stress and cope with difficult situations that they encountered in their day-to-day lives. However, dedication to dance and the significant amount of time devoted to the activity resulted in tensions with an already busy life.
- Being creative and exploring movement to music enabled participants to experience authentic self-expression in a way that allowed them to display their personality and express their thoughts and feelings.
- The young people reported that participating in dance helped them to focus on their health and better understand the importance of leading a healthier lifestyle.
- Dancing helped the young people feel physically healthier, but also resulted in feelings of fatigue and minor injuries which are common in youth sport and physical activity participation.
- The participants reported that dance helped them to develop their confidence in their ability to relate to others both inside and outside the studio and harnessed ways of socializing through opportunities to create new routines and problem-solve.
- Dance provided opportunities for the young people to give and receive support within a culture which was characterised by mutual encouragement.
- Dance fostered positive peer relationships. However, negative social interactions were also conveyed by some of the young dancers.
- Dance provided opportunities for young people to access high quality dance and deepen their engagement in the activity by progressing their skills and abilities.
- Dance fostered a range of positive feelings and emotions, which contributed to the young dancers' overall quality of life.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Implications and recommendations

The findings from this project suggest that dance is a valuable way to empower young people who live in deprived urban areas to be proactive in improving their health and well-being. Dance can help young people boost their confidence, increase their life satisfaction, develop social skills, and promote active and healthy lifestyles.

From a critical perspective, there is a need within the sector to promote the unique role that dance can play in meeting not only the physical needs of young people but when framed around Quality of Life also their physical, psychological, social and environmental needs.

From an applied perspective, community-based programmes that promote better health and positive development of young people should be prioritized. This highlights the importance of looking for appropriate community-based partners to invest in the development of community programmes in order to facilitate the health and well-being of this population.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Acknowledgments

This study was supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Our thanks go to the research team, Dr Shaunna Burke, Dr Andrea Utley, Dr Sarah Astill of the School of Biomedical Sciences, The University of Leeds; to Dr Louise McDowall for data collection and assisting with analysis; to Sarah Lyon for supporting recruitment of participants; and to the participants for their involvement in this study.

Enquiries about this report should be addressed to Dr Shaunna Burke at s.burke@leeds.ac.uk / 0113 343 5086 / School of Biomedical Sciences, The University of Leeds, LS2 9JT and Andrea Smart at andreamart@yorkshiredance.com / 0113 243 9867 / Yorkshire Dance, 3 St Peter's Buildings, St Peter's Square, Leeds LS9 8AH.

Young people and neighbourhood deprivation: The bigger picture

Yorkshire Dance Youth © Sara Teresa



June 2018



Our participants shared:

“I moved back to Leeds for the tenth time. I’ve lived in Hull, Scunthorpe, Blackpool, Scotland, Leeds, and then we went back to Blackpool and back here again. I’ve been moving around – moving around all the primary schools as well.”

“My mum’s moving house because once she moves they aren’t allowed to tell my stepdad where my mum is because he will find her. Anywhere she goes, he will find her. I can’t say anything about where she is after she’s moved.”

“There’s a pub and there’s gambling shops and stuff, the normal things that they put in deprived areas I guess. There are still racist parts as well. I remember when I recently moved there this black boy got beaten up at the bus stop.”

“When I was younger I experienced a lot of violence with people out on the street, like bullying me, and once, one of the children on my street threw a rock at ma’ head. It missed me, but not by much.”

“So it’s a bit of a mundane place. We don’t really talk to any of our neighbours. We’re quite a closed family, a closed nuclear family, that’s what we are... So it [Yorkshire Dance] is nice in a way, because if you don’t have anywhere to go—like I don’t really, then I can come here, and I can come see my friends.”

“Money definitely worries me. I haven’t really had money and I’m overworking myself to the point where I feel like giving up.”

Approximately 2.7 million young people are living in poverty in the UK. Neighbourhood deprivation is characterised by high rates of unemployment, divorce, low socio-economic status, and residential mobility. Residents who live in poor areas experience about four times the social, environmental, and health problems (e.g., community violence, poor educational achievement, obesity, substance abuse, and mental health disorders) of people who live in more affluent areas. In Leeds, a fifth of the population are living in areas ranked amongst the most deprived nationally. East Leeds is one of these areas of deprivation, with over three quarters of its population living in poverty, and is where a high percentage of the city’s social housing is found. Unemployment, obesity, smoking, teenage pregnancies and crime rates are all far higher in East Leeds than the city of Leeds average. Deprived residential areas have the potential to adversely impact on health and thwart successful youth development. Adolescence is a time of marked social and biological change, and a time when health behaviours are becoming established. It is therefore critical for children and young people from low socio-economic households to be encouraged to adopt healthier lifestyles by forming activity habits that may serve as protective factors into adulthood. Providing opportunities for young people who live in deprived neighbourhoods to participate in health enhancing activities that are affordable and accessible is of significant importance.

Yorkshire Dance is a dance development organisation and registered charity that provides opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to take part in dance. It has offered free dance provision for young people living in deprived communities in East Leeds for seven years. Focused on urban and contemporary dance styles, the company’s youth programme consists of developing technical competencies (e.g., alignment, posture, coordination), building artistic and interpretative skills (e.g., musicality, expression), and creativity. The Dance for Health, Well-being and Empowerment of Young People research project, funded by Arts Council England (ACE), investigated the impact of this established youth dance company on the health, well-being, and sense of empowerment of young people who live in East Leeds. The project also explored how dance influenced their health and well-being from the perspective of parents / carers, teachers, and dance tutors.

The project was guided by the Adolescent Quality of Life Conceptual Model, which focuses on four domains of youth health and well-being: sense of self (i.e., belief in self, being oneself, mental health, physical health, spirituality); social relationships (i.e., adult support, caring for others, family relations, freedom, friendships, participation, peer relations); environment (i.e., engagement and activities, good education, neighbourhood, monetary resources, personal safety, view of future); and general quality of life (i.e., enjoying life, feeling life is worthwhile, and satisfied with one’s life). Yorkshire Dance believes that the performing arts and physical activity through dance have a significant role to play in promoting the health and quality of life of the population including young people. This project describes what we have learned about the power of dance to effect change in the lives of young people who live in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods.

Project aims

Early evidence shows that dance plays a significant role in improving the health and well-being of young people by improving cardiovascular health, preventing and reducing obesity, enhancing social skills, increasing mood and self-esteem, and improving physical activity levels. However, there is a lack of comprehensive data in this area and very little research has focused on how community-based dance programmes impact on the lives of youth who reside in deprived areas. The Dance for Health, Well-being and Empowerment of Young People project set out to understand how dance impacted on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of young people who live in poor neighbourhoods in Leeds.

Project methodology

This study used an exploratory longitudinal research design involving both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate how dance impacted on the health and well-being of young people from East Leeds. Multiple methods were used to collect data from the perspective of youth dance participants, parents, teachers, and dance tutors.

Qualitative

In partnership with The University of Leeds, the qualitative aspect of this project explored the impact of our youth dance program on young people's quality of life. It was guided by an ethnographic approach, which is focused on understanding the culture of a particular group from the perspective of its group members in order to lend insight into members behaviors, thoughts, emotions, and values. Against this backdrop, we were interested in gaining a comprehensive understanding of how the contemporary dance culture influenced the quality of life of young people who live in East Leeds. A researcher from The University of Leeds immersed herself in the contemporary dance environment of the participants over a period of ten months by attending weekly dance sessions. Fieldwork involved spending time with the participants before and during each dance session observing their behaviour, language and interactions, as well as participating in situations specific to the dance group (e.g. group meetings, rehearsals).

Qualitative research is used to explore people's reasons, opinions, motivations, and perceptions of their behaviours and often uses interviews, observations, and focus group interviews to collect data.

Ethnography is the systematic study of the behaviour of people in specific cultural groups and often uses fieldwork to record observed behaviour.

Quantitative

In parallel with our qualitative work, we also administered self-report questionnaires. Questionnaires were administered at 4 time points across the 10 month project with two dance groups (i.e., junior and senior youth dance participants) and a control group.

Quantitative research uses measurement and numerical analysis involving self-report questionnaires and surveys

Participants

Participants included: Youth dancers (n=57; 88% female; age range 10–20; mean age 14; attended on average 16.5 sessions), parents (n=4); dance tutors (n=3); teachers (n=3). The control group included: youth (n=8; mean age 15).

Youth Dance Company

The youth dance company consisted of free, open access dance provision offered to young people aged 11 – 14 (junior company) and 15 – 19 (senior company). Sessions lasted 1.5 – 2 hours per week and were held at Yorkshire Dance. Guided by an innovative model supported by the igen Trust, the youth company programs involved 3 phases which took place during one academic year: (a) taster sessions and recruitment with schools in the community of East Leeds, (b) youth dance companies were formed at Yorkshire Dance alongside the creation and rehearsal of new choreography which took its starting point in a pertinent topic decided by the young people (i.e. self-identity). Young people worked with artists to develop their understanding of the chosen topic. Opportunities to engage in internal performances / sharing sessions with family, friends, and community contacts and work towards Arts Award were provided. (c) the senior youth company performed the new choreography in a school tour within their community with an accompanied discussion / workshop element which they co-led alongside lead artists.



Data collection and analysis

Data was collected over a 10-month period spanning the start to the completion of two youth dance companies – a junior and senior group. A large amount of qualitative data was collected using multiple methods including formal in-depth interviews, informal conversations, focus group interviews, and participant observation.

Data included:

- 10 months of weekly observation sessions (75 obs.; 36 junior, 38 senior)
- 32 formal, in-depth individual interviews and informal (in ‘the field’) conversations with youth participants
- 4 focus group interviews with youth participants (n=6)
- 1 focus group with parents / carers (n=4)
- 1 focus group interview with Junior Dance Practitioners (n=2) and 1 individual interview with Senior Dance Practitioner
- 3 individual interviews with High School teachers

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. All identifying details were removed from transcripts and field notes. Framework analysis was used to analyse the transcripts and field notes. The aim of the analysis was to identify key experiences for each participant in terms of their participation in the dance company, before examining common themes across the sample. Analysis of the qualitative data provides nuance, context, and meaning to our study findings. The following criteria were selected to ensure the rigour of our study: peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, exploiting exceptional data, thick description and integration of multi-methods.

Quantitative data was also collected at 4 time-points throughout the project to complement the qualitative data. Self-report questionnaires were used to assess physical self-concept, resilience, psychological distress, mental well-being, and physical activity. Data was analysed using parametric and inferential statistics.

“...That I can believe in myself, and do things that I never thought I could do before...”

– Youth, interview

“Over time people have told me that “I’m good” at dancing and I’ve started to believe in myself a bit more.”

– Youth, interview

“It’s [dance] made her more confident. It’s [dance] brought her out of her shell especially this past year. She is louder and more vocal”.

– Parent, focus group

Descriptive summary of findings

Impact on sense of self

The theme covering the impact of dance on young people’s sense of self was the most diverse theme identified. It comprises five specific aspects that contributed to the young dancers’ quality of life. These five aspects included: (a) building self-confidence, (b) decreasing (and increasing) stress, (c) freedom of self-expression, (d) developing healthy habits and, (e) improving (and worsening) physical well-being.

Building self-confidence

Dance helped the young people build confidence in their dance abilities and discover what their bodies were capable of doing, regardless of their skill level (i.e., novice, intermediate). Developing skills and becoming successful in mastering a new skill increased their physical self-efficacy contributing to their self-confidence. Many of the young dancers discussed the benefits they derived from challenging themselves to engage in physically demanding dance moves that involved complex coordination. Being successful in a particular skill or movement helped them to realise that they were competent dancers capable of achieving more.

The confidence they gained from practising dance extended beyond their perceptions of their physical dance abilities and into other areas of their lives (e.g., school, home). For example, some of the dancers’ parents noticed that dance helped their daughter or son become more self-assured.

“I don’t think I’m going to be able to stop it [dancing] because it keeps me afloat. If I’ve had a stressful day at college I can come to dance and let it all go and I feel fine again. It’s like your release from everything and I think that’s what it is to me.”

– Youth, interview

“Because my stepdad’s been phoning me, which – I don’t like him at all, and my mum wants him gone. I’m trying to push him away. So coming to dance helps me concentrate on one thing at a time. Put my problems to one side. It [dance] takes my mind off everything, and like it gives me less stress. Then when the session’s finished I go back to that situation and try and sort that all out.”

– Youth, interview

“I turn up here some days and I’ll have had a really bad day. Stuff will have all gone wrong, everywhere. As soon as I get up there [dance floor], I just forget it.”

– Youth, interview

Stress

Dance helped the young people to manage their stress and cope with difficult situations that they encountered in their day-to-day lives (e.g., parental conflict, school / exam stress, peer bullying). Participating in dance was beneficial for helping them to make sense of difficult situations and channel their emotions. It helped the young dancers to let go of what was bothering them, which was important for their general well-being.

For some of the young dancers, dance helped reduce or prevent emotional reactions and outbursts.

“I would like probably like hit a wall if I was really mad because that’s just the person I am, but like, with dance like you can just channel it in a way and just get everything out.”

– Youth, interview

Dance was also beneficial for helping them shift their focus away from their worries and troubles. Focusing on dance helped them be in the present moment, which provided relief from their preoccupations with their personal circumstances and served as a break from being consumed by their worries. Engaging in dance provided a distraction from their worries.

On the one hand dance helped the participants cope with difficult situations that they experienced. However, on the other hand, dance led to experiences of increased stress and pressure. Dedication to dance and the significant amount of time devoted to the activity resulted in tensions and conflicts with an already busy life.

“I have a lot of stress, with college work and dance. I’d be like, ‘oh I’ve got dance tonight but I need to do this for college.’ Then other things like social life, it was just all getting on top of me. Then I just fainted.”

– Youth, interview

X enters the dance studio and approaches the dance tutor. She looks flustered and panicked as she tries to catch her breath. She asks whether she can either leave early or do some work now before and during the first half of the session. She is really behind with her assignments / homework and does not have time to get it all done.

– Field observation

“Like for me dance is the easiest way to get it out. Sometimes I am really talkative... But then sometimes I don’t want to talk. I dance and I feel better for it because I’ve kind of got it out, but not said it. So, I think that’s definitely good to have because then you have more than one option. Like I don’t have to go to somebody and say, “Oh this is the issue.” I can sort of dance it, and be like, I haven’t had to go to somebody. I’ve got it out and I’ve sorted it.”

– Youth, interview

“I think they are making changes and becoming more aware. I think the drinking of more fluids and water to prevent dehydration, to get everything circulating and stuff, just simple little, subtle things have started to build up... They’ve been more perceptive and aware of their own health and well-being. Even with what they eat.”

– Teacher, interview

“Yeah I still see myself doing dance when I’m older. Maybe not the styles I’m doing now or things like that, because I know that they can be a lot rougher on the body as you get older, but I still see myself doing something at least, even if it’s just like one class a week, going and doing something... I think I’d be empty without it.”

– Youth, interview

Freedom of self-expression

The young dancers reported that they were able to express themselves freely through dance. Dance provided them with an outlet to move with spontaneity, grace and awareness. Being creative and exploring movement to music enabled them to experience authentic self-expression in a way that allowed them to display their personality and express their thoughts and feelings.

“Dance has no limits. I can be me, freedom of interpretation definitely. I can take a movement and make it into anything I want.”

For some participants, dance provided a means to articulate their thoughts and feelings especially at times when they struggled to express themselves or find the words to communicate how they were feeling.

“It [dancing] is a good way to get all your emotions out. So rather than having to talk to someone about something, you can just do it [talk] through movements and express how you feel. If I’m feeling angry you’ll probably notice because my movement’s massive or if I’m feeling a bit tired you’ll notice because I’m a little bit down on the floor.”

Instilling healthy habits

The young people reported that participating in dance helped them to focus on their health and better understand the importance of leading a healthier lifestyle. In particular, engaging in dance helped them become mindful of how certain foods and smoking made them feel and how this impacted on their performance. Dance also instilled a desire to continue dancing in the future. It encouraged them to adopt healthy habits and lead healthier lifestyles.

“When I first started coming here [Yorkshire Dance], I did what I usually did and went to McDonalds or somewhere like that after school and then I’d come here [Yorkshire Dance] and try and run about. I’d just get the biggest stitch. Everyone thought I was really lazy because I got a stitch after walking for two seconds. But now, on a Wednesday night, I’ll go home after school and I’ll tell myself on the bus home that I’m not getting chicken nuggets and I’m going to go home and I’ll eat just like a salad or a burger or some chips. I feel better when I get here.”



“It’s [dance] helping me get a lot more flexible. I’m also a lot stronger like I’m able to be on one foot for longer, like on point.”

– Youth, interview

“Dance is so tiring. You’ll literally get home from dance, you’ll shower, and you’ll put on your best dressing gown. And you just get into bed and you think ‘Relaxation’, and then your mind thinks ‘You’ve got two assignments to do that are due in for this Friday’.”

– Youth, interview

“They develop social skills. The way they communicate. They have to work together when performing and devising sequences. But also the confidence to speak out in front of others and not be the shy one and reserved and just sit there.”

– Teacher

“Like here [YD] you have to learn to talk to different people, be with other people, and work with them.”

– Youth, interview

Physical well-being

Dancing helped the young dancers feel physically healthier. They reported specific benefits in terms of their physical fitness and strength, flexibility, sleep quality, weight / body composition and ability to relax.

“I was really fat. I was still dancing but I had loads of weight on me so I used to get bullied all the time. So I was really quiet. As soon as the weight dropped off because I was dancing and eating properly, that’s it – confidence boost went up and you just can’t stop me from talking now.”

– Youth, interview

Yet some dancers had negative experiences related to their physical health. Some of them felt drained and fatigued after a long day at school followed by dance. Others reported experiencing injuries as a result of dance.

Impact on social relationships

Participants mostly experienced benefits to their social well-being as a result of participating in the dance program. Developing social confidence and skills, fostering (and damaging) peer relations, and giving and receiving support were reported. These social experiences mainly contributed to improving the young dancers’ quality of life.

Developing social confidence and skills

The young dancers reported that dance helped them to develop their confidence in their ability to relate to others both inside and outside the studio. Dance introduced and harnessed ways of socializing though opportunities to create new routines and problem-solve. Interacting with other dancers and participating in group activities helped them learn to negotiate their own wants and needs in a group context. Working together on sequences of movement to achieve a common goal improved their communication and team work skills.

For dancers who were particularly shy, anxious in new social situations, or lacking in verbal confidence dance was crucial for developing modes of engaging and interacting with others.

Peer relationships

Meeting new people through dance resulted in new friendships forming. For some of the young dancers, these friendships extended beyond dance and into other areas of their lives (e.g., school). For the most part, the dance context facilitated social connections within the group mostly because it provided opportunities to make new connections. The young dancers reported that dance increased feelings of relatedness, belonging and camaraderie. They felt understood in a context characterised by reciprocal approval.

“When the group work as one unit through unison in close proximity to one another there is an establishment of kinaesthetic empathy, as all members are performing the movement material that one member has devised so are reinforcing and relating to this individual and their own unique style through movement. Breathing in synch, rhythmically in synch the synchronised movements mean they move as one organism. In theory this could facilitate a nice way of connecting, harmonising and sensitising the group to one another as they are performing material at the same time and focusing around a collective breath which ebbs and flows.”

– Field observation

Nevertheless, negative social interactions were conveyed by some of the young dancers who experienced adverse interpersonal conflicts with other dancer in their group, which detracted from their social well-being and hindered the social camaraderie they experienced.

“I literally made friends with them through Yorkshire Dance, about two years ago and I’m really close to them now. Like, we’ve got a really strong friendship.”

– Youth, interview

“It [dance] helps me to feel more included in something – so it’s like I feel part of something.”

– Youth, interview

“I feel like I get talked about in lessons and stuff, but I just ignore it all, to be fair. I try not to care what everyone else says but it’s hard.”

– Youth, interview

“We’re happy to help each other. That goes for everybody. If I didn’t get a bit I could go to somebody and be like ‘I’ve no idea what’s going on’ and they’ll be like ‘this is happening’. But at the same time if somebody came to me and was like ‘will you show me that bit again’, I would do it. So I think it’s definitely a strength that we help each other.”

– Youth, interview

Giving and receiving support

Dance provided opportunities for the young people to give and receive support. The dance culture was characterized by mutual encouragement, which offered participants opportunities for informal peer support and support from dance tutors. The types of support received included informational, practical, and emotional support. This was evidenced through experiences of social integration including feelings of inclusion, being part of something, being a family, and feeling cared for and connected to other members and tutors.

“Once you step through the door, it’s like there’s your family waiting for me. So we’ve got one big family... It’s like somebody is actually there for me, not at home watching TV.”



“X [dance tutor] is such a big role model... I was actually contemplating just getting a job and that’s it. Cos I had the grades for it... but X [dance tutor] were like ‘Seriously, do it [go to university]’ she went ‘you will be able to do it [Dance at University], you’ve got the skill to do it’. I was like ‘But Uni?’ And she’s like ‘Yeah go – do it. It’s something different.’”

– Youth, interview

“It [dance] gives her somewhere to go and something to do. Otherwise she’d be in her bedroom on her mobile phone.”

– Parent

“It’s been more fulfilling, because I used to go home, sit there, do nothing, and now on a Wednesday night I’ve got something to do... and I’ve really enjoyed coming here, and it’s just been a really exciting thing.”

– Youth, interview

“I just loved the context of it – the fact that there was a new way of doing something, and none of my family know what dance – well they know what dance is, but they don’t know the style that I do. They don’t know like much about it. So being the first one in my family to participate in like Performing Arts. Like, the first, cos I’m the first one also to get this far in my education.”

– Youth, interview

Impact on environment

Providing opportunities

The dance company provided opportunities for the young people to access high quality dance and deepen their engagement in the activity by progressing their skills and abilities. The programme gave participants opportunities that were not only directly related to dance (e.g., dancing, choreography, performing, progression onto training for a dance career) but also indirectly related to their lives outside of dance (e.g., taking on leadership roles, CV building).

“Umm and I can say, I won’t say brag, but I can say a lot of things like that other people can’t really say... “Oh I’ve performed at Wembley Stadium, or the Rugby World Cup. And I’ve performed at the Olympic torch” like – they’re some of the opportunities that Yorkshire Dance has given me, which is good, and like great for me to put on a CV”

General Quality of Life

Evoking positive feelings and emotion

Dance fostered a range of positive feelings and emotions, which contributed to the young dancers’ overall quality of life. The dancers used specific terms such as ‘happy,’ ‘proud’ and ‘accomplished’ to describe how they felt about themselves as a result of dance. They also expressed more general feelings of well-being.

However, participating in the dance programme also led to disappointments and frustrations.

“But there have been times, I’m not gonna diss Yorkshire Dance, but there have been times when I’m like, ‘I can’t be bothered, because I know the class is gonna be boring.’ We had a woman called (XX) and my style didn’t really click with her style, she always underrated the group, and it was a very childish piece. I hated coming in, and it was a very like, ‘Urgh’, it was a burden at that point.”

– Youth

“I feel better. I feel so much better after I’ve danced. If I’ve spent a day not dancing, I’m not happy.”

– Youth



Implications and recommendations

The findings from this project suggest that dance is a valuable way to empower young people who live in deprived urban areas to be proactive in improving their health and well-being. Dance can help young people boost their confidence, increase their life satisfaction, develop social skills and promote active and healthy lifestyles. However, the statistical data did not reveal significant differences in outcomes related to health and well-being.

This study suggests that the framing of dance as a health intervention should be approached holistically and not solely based on a singular aspect of adolescent health (i.e. physical; e.g., increased muscular strength, weight management). From a critical perspective, there is a need within the sector to promote the unique role that dance can play in meeting not only the physical needs of young people but when framed around Quality of Life also their physical, psychological, social and environmental needs. Importantly, these multiple health benefits are not simply a by-product of participation in dance but derive as a result of the intrinsic features of the activity when taught and framed through pedagogical approaches which encourage divergent thinking, ownership and agency of the individual, working as an ensemble, imagination and creativity, working with / through touch and a psychosocial climate which promotes an ethics of care.

Disadvantaged youth is a particularly important population for future research and intervention in the field of performing arts as evidence is limited in this area. Future research may want to explore the impact of dance on stressors related to living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods among youth populations.

From an applied perspective, community-based programmes that promote better health and positive development of young people should be prioritized. This highlights the importance of looking for appropriate community-based partners to invest in the development of community programmes in order to facilitate the health and well-being of this population.

Our partners

The University of Leeds

Researchers from Sport & Exercise Sciences are embedded in the Cardiovascular and Sport Sciences research group of the School of Biomedical Sciences, and their research was ranked 1st for 'World Leading' 4* research in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Research is funded via RCUK, charitable and industry sources and interests are broad ranging, from investigating the role of exercise in health and well-being across a range of groups (e.g. cancer patients, obese individuals, community-dwelling older adults), to answering physiological questions about cardiovascular and nervous systems, and how they respond to exercise.

A number of staff collaborate with researchers from Leeds NHS Teaching Hospitals giving direct access to clinical colleagues, and they collaborate with researchers in Faculties from across the University. leeds.ac.uk

Arts Council England

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. It supports activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections.

Its overall mission is 'Great Art and Culture for Everyone'.

Its research programme aims to increase our collective knowledge and understanding about the impact of art and culture on people's lives. artscouncil.org.uk

Yorkshire Dance

Yorkshire Dance champions the value of dance and its development throughout Yorkshire. We do so by raising standards, increasing knowledge and understanding, and by fostering creativity and innovation.

We support local artists to create exciting new works by providing advice, studio space and opportunities to perform to a live audience.

We transform and inspire the communities of Yorkshire by creating opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to see, make and take part in high quality dance. yorkshiredance.com

YORKSHIRE DANCE

Yorkshire Dance
3 St Peter's Buildings
St Peter's Square
Leeds, LS9 8AH

Yorkshire Dance Centre Trust
Registered Company No 2319572 England & Wales
Registered Charity No. 701624



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



arts@leeds



yorkshiredance.com

