



Dance 123 – Improving positive body image & reducing eating disorders amongst children and young people

Project Overview

1.6 m people in the UK are affected by eating disorders. A typical general practitioner list of 2000 patients could expect to have 20 patients with an ED, many of whom will be adolescent females. 11% are now young men.

Eating disorders don't just affect one person, but families, friends and colleagues. They are a serious mental health problem and are responsible for more loss of life than any other type of psychological illness.

A UCL report in April 2011 indicates a rise in cases among young people. 92% of children surveyed said they couldn't talk about it. Conditions become entrenched before they do. Music and dance are known to be helpful forms of therapy to improve self-esteem.

A recent piece of research carried out by national Eating Disorders charity Beat among Young sufferers in the West Midlands showed that 25% of the young people surveyed would access music therapy and 18% dance therapy if such therapies were available. Currently they are not.

Dance 123 is a project run by Body Image Dance (BID) in Staffordshire. It aims to improve positive body image and to reduce the numbers of children and young people developing eating disorders and other destructive coping strategies, by enabling them to express their feelings and emotions in a creative and safe manner through music and dance. In this way they hope to show how people can change the way they feel about themselves and how they can overcome negative behaviours in small manageable steps: 1, 2, 3 ¹

Project Outcome

Partly funded by Big Lottery Fund, a group of a dozen artists composed choreographed and performed a dance piece at Newcastle under Lyme College in September 2011, to 150 invitees from education, industry, local government and health. A short trailer and documentary about Dance 123, were produced.²

A collaboration between BID and Staffordshire and Derby Universities led to a pilot study in February 2012 which looked at The Impact of a Dance Movement Therapy Intervention on Young People's Body Image.³

¹ See Youtube clip <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mU5n5ISB6WE>

² SEE; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kL9HZlhKiZk>

³ See Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rqrs21>

Dance and body image: young people's experiences of a dance movement psychotherapy session





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Seven young women and six young men all aged 17 years old took part in a dance session based on a therapeutic intervention informed by dance movement psychotherapy. After the session, they gave accounts of the experience in focus groups and interviews. Their accounts were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis.

Three themes were identified: Connectedness, Lack of Self-consciousness, and Body Acceptance. The session impacted positively on these young men and women's body image leading them to feel more connected to their bodies, freer, less self-conscious, and more accepting of their bodies after the session.

It is concluded that future work needs to investigate the role of the facilitator and the school environment in producing these positive results, but general findings suggest that this is a promising procedure for use with both young men and women in this age group.

BID has funding for a series of 6 workshops based on this study which it hopes to deliver in a school setting later in the year.

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